

THE HOUSE BY THE ROAD

CHARLES J. DUTTON



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THE HOUSE BY THE ROAD

BY
CHARLES J. DUTTON

AUTHOR OF
"THE UNDERWOOD MYSTERY," "THE SHADOW
ON THE GLASS," ETC.



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To my friend of many years

J. NILES POTTER

*Who will remember our walking trip through
Vermont, when we first saw*

THE HOUSE BY THE ROAD



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The House by the Road

CHAPTER I

THE KNIFE BETWEEN THE SHOULDERS

FOR the last hour or so the motor had not been running smoothly, and, as I came to the top of the long hill, it was with a sigh of relief that I saw the lights of the small city far below. That I was glad to see them was putting it mildly. I had been driving all afternoon, and, ever since the darkness had fallen, the car had been acting badly. I had looked under the hood several times to discover what the trouble might be, yet I had found nothing. Nursing a heavy car along a dark country road, with the rain threatening to fall at any moment, is not a task that I enjoy.

As I slid over the top of the hill, I saw there was a gradual drop of several miles before I could reach the lighted city in the valley below. The road was slippery and muddy, while the great trees on each side made it even darker than the night itself. It was a somber, lonely road, without the slightest

sign of life, or, for that matter, of houses. But I had seen very few houses during the afternoon, the roads that I had traversed being of the usual Vermont type, with farms far and few between. I had hoped to reach Springfield by evening, but the trouble with the engine had delayed me. Now I decided that I would have the car looked over in a garage and spend the night in the town whose lights lay before me.

The car picked up in speed, as I started to run down the hill, and the lamps threw a yellow ray of light through the misty darkness. Not only were the first drops of rain dashing against my face, but, by the way the wind was rising, I could tell that it would be raining very hard in a few moments. I was glad the town was near at hand, for a heavy storm in an open car was not to my liking. The car skidded all over the road, which, like most country roads, was very narrow. The woods on each side seemed simply a black mass, and it was one of the darkest nights I had ever seen. For a moment I pictured Bartley in his library—the fireplace with its cheery blaze—and the great room with its walls of books making me wish that I, too, were there. It was about ten o'clock, and Bartley would be seated in his large chair, a book in his hand, and his Airedale, "Trouble," at his feet.

The wind had heightened considerably during the short time that had elapsed since I first saw the lights of the town, and it was now blowing in short and angry gusts that caused the trees on each side of the road to lash to and fro. The rain was falling steadily and heavily, and already I was pretty wet. I no longer could see the lights of the town, a bend in the road ahead of me hiding them from sight. One of the headlights had gone wrong, and, the hill being very steep at this point, I had to put on the brake. The car lurched and slipped from one side of the road to the other, and I cursed the friend who had picked this route for me, saying that the dirt roads were very good.

I think I had gone about a mile when I noticed that the speed of the car was decreasing. I threw on more gas, but with no appreciable result. Suddenly, with a half sigh, the engine gave a little cough and "died." The car rolled a few feet farther and stopped. I could tell that I had come to a level place in the road, beyond which the hill dipped away again—but that was not very consoling. I tried everything I could think of to start the car again, but in vain. Climbing out into the mud, I grasped the crank and cranked till I thought my back would break, but nothing came of it. The engine refused to respond.

Straightening up, I made a few choice remarks to no one in particular, and then, feeling a bit better, threw the crank into the car and tried to think what I should do next. Somewhere below me was the town, not more than a mile away. If I walked there, I could soon have a garage send a man out to the car. But I did not feel overmuch like walking. The wind was blowing the rain in sheets against me, a cold rain that seemed to cut through my clothes. Long before I reached the town, I would be in the state of the proverbial wet hen. The walking itself would not be pleasant, for the road was slippery with mud, the wet, clinging soil of a country road. What to do, I scarcely knew, and the longer I stood in the road, the wetter and colder I would become.

I gave a glance around, and then for the first time I noticed distinctly where stretched the woods, dark and forbidding; on the other, at my right, I could make out the dim figure of a house—a house that loomed ghostly and faintly against the darkness—a huge black mass. It was set some distance from the road, with a few trees in what I thought must be a yard—trees bending and swaying in the wind. The house was not far away, but in the darkness I was unable to distinguish any signs of life about it. No light streamed from any window; no

dog barked a warning at me from the yard. Back of the house, simply great masses of darkness, were what I judged to be the barns.

For a moment I gazed at the house. I had not noticed it when the car stopped, because all my attention had been needed to keep the car in the road. But it struck me that the car could not have stopped in a better place. True, the house seemed to be uninhabited, yet I instinctively felt that some one must live there. If so, then I could telephone to a garage in the town, I thought, or perhaps find in the house somebody who knew about cars.

Leaving the car, I walked over toward the house. I came against a fence, but in a second found the gate, which was swung half open. A pebbled walk, the stones slippery from the rain, led to the house which loomed silent before me. Though it was very dark, yet I could faintly make out the yard. The grass was almost waist-high, overhanging the sides of the walk, which was littered with the small branches which the high wind had blown from the trees. Even the steps that led to the veranda had rotted away with age.

I found myself on a large piazza that seemed to extend the entire length of the front of the house, and it was here I received a surprise. There had

been no signs of light from any of the windows, and I soon discovered that there could not have been, for all the windows were boarded up with heavy, thick boards which had been nailed across them. Evidently the house was deserted, and I would receive no help here.

For a moment I stood wondering whether it would not be wiser for me to walk to the village. The only sound was the wind lashing through the trees, the dropping of small branches in the near-by woods, and the dashing of the rain against the side of the house. It was certainly raining hard, and seemingly it was increasing—a steady, heavy downpour, a rain that would wet one to the skin in a few seconds if one were out in it. Even on the veranda it was nearly as bad, for the wind whipped the rain across it in sheets. Crouching up against the side of the house, I decided to wait there, at least till the storm had abated somewhat.

I had stood there perhaps five minutes, feeling lonely and a bit depressed, when I noticed that the front door of the house was only a few feet away. I had made up my mind it was useless to expect to find that any one lived there, since the whole appearance of the house and yard, to say nothing of the boarded windows, testified that the place was deserted. But I went over to the door and

then suddenly I stopped and stood silently looking at it. The door was open, swaying back and forth with the wind, yet for some reason not swinging to far enough to close.

As I stood, watching the door swing to and fro, I was frankly puzzled. If the house was deserted, with the windows boarded as they were, I would have expected to find the door locked—but it was open. I placed my hand against it and peered into the dark hall. It was a black cave, silent, gloomy, depressing. Not a sound came from within—only the wind and the dashing of the rain could be heard. I looked steadily, as if by the intensity of my gaze I could pierce the dense blackness. As my eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, I could dimly make out the darker shadows that marked the furniture in the hall. The house was deserted, yet it was furnished.

My hand, groping over the door, fell against a bell, one of those old-fashioned bells which you turn to ring. Hardly knowing why, I turned the bell. There came a loud, clanging ring, that surged through the house like the sound of a clarion, dying away in a ghostly echo. But there came no response, and I did not ring again; the sound had been a bit more dismal than I enjoyed under the circumstances.

There came another gust of wind, and I felt the house rock, followed by a burst of rain that dashed over me and into the hall. I was rapidly getting soaked more and more, and if I stayed on the outside I would be drenched to the skin in a moment. I turned and gave a half glance at the road, where the lamps of the car cast a friendly shaft of light in the distance.

Now I turned again and stepped into the hall, going a few feet, then pausing. Why I paused I do not know. But for a second it seemed that, above the sound of the storm, the dashing of the rain against the house, I had heard a sound, a sound that I could not locate definitely, a sound which seemed to come from overhead. Yet I was not sure. I paused, waiting, listening eagerly. In another moment I concluded that I had been deceived, for there was nothing to be heard but the wind and the rain.

I had stumbled against what must have been a table, and for a second I stood silent, steadying myself with one hand. There seemed to be stairs that ran to the second floor, for there was a dark mass at the end of the hall. But I could not distinguish anything, and I wished that I had brought my flash light from the car. The house was still, though

once in a while I could hear something creak, as a dash of wind beat against the walls.

As I stood there, waiting for the rain to let up, I began to feel a bit queer. The darkness, the old house, the weird sound of the wind in the trees, began to affect me. There seemed to be something that I could feel, some psychological thing that made me nervous. I peered down the hall. It stretched dark and lonely ahead of me. Nothing moved, and no sound came to my ears except the wind and the rain outside. Yet I felt lonesome, and that old racial fear of the dark which is in us all began to sweep over me. I thought of Bartley's assertion that "we fear the dark because in man's subconscious mind there is the long heritage of the past, when the darkness held danger of mankind." I was not afraid, but I began to wish more earnestly than ever that the car had not broken down.

Shaking off the feeling that was creeping over me, I moved a few feet farther into the hall, stumbling over a chair, the noise of which echoed through the house. Before me, on my right, was a door that evidently led into a parlor, and it was open. The room, because of the boarded windows, was darker than the hall. In the hall, the open door had afforded a glimmer of light from without, but the room I peered

into was black—with a darkness that one could not pierce, nor distinguish even the shadow of an object.

Why I did it, I never knew, but I groped my way into the room, stumbling against a chair in which I seated myself. At any rate it was better than being out in the rain and better than standing in the hall. But the longer I sat there the more uneasy I became. There seemed to be nothing to cause the uneasiness. Perhaps it was the loneliness of it all, the dark, deserted house, the sound of the storm. But, as I sat there, I began to feel creepy. The darkness seemed almost as if it were alive—a darkness that crept around one, stifling one, that even seemed to move. The room appeared alive, as if in the shadows there were objects waiting to reach for one, to clutch and envelop one.

I tried to explain the feeling away. Reason and education told me that it was caused by depression. Yet, at the same time, reason helped little. I could feel something, something that seemed to threaten me, something indescribable that was around, that held a portent of evil. I half started to rise to go out into the open, raining though it was, when the thought of running away simply because it was dark caused me to fall back into my seat.

For a while the feeling of depression vanished, as I listened eagerly, hoping the storm had died

away sufficiently for me to walk to the town. Then the feeling began to come back. Something told me I was not alone in the room, something was there with me, something that in the dense darkness waited, as I was waiting, something evil, something I could feel, but could not see. A little shiver of fear went over me, and to throw it aside I reached for my cigarette case. Finding my lighter, I opened it, and there came the little burst of flame that split the blackness around me. I started to apply it to my cigarette, when suddenly my glance fell at my feet—at an object lying there.

As my hand trembled, and I bent forward to look, the cigarette was forgotten, and the flame in the lighter shook because of the trembling of my hand. Half dazed, I looked at the object at my feet, and I know my face went white. With a hand that shook I held the lighter lower and half bent forward. I had felt a presence in the room, I had known I was not alone there, and I had not been.

For, as I looked, there at my feet lay a man—a man who would not stir again, to whom the storm and the darkness would never matter. A man, half turned on his side, with a look of horror and fright upon the upturned face. And, as I looked, it did not need the sight of the knife that protruded between his shoulders to tell me what had taken

place. Something had been there with me. There in that darkened house, with the wind and the rain dashing against its sides, I was alone with a murdered man.

CHAPTER II

SUSPECTED OF MURDER

I CANNOT say just how long I bent forward, looking at the still figure that lay at my feet. My hand was trembling, and the little flickering flame from the lighter cast weird dancing shadows over the floor. Before I had started to light my cigarette I had felt afraid; I was still afraid. There in the lonely house, with only the wind and the rain to break the silence, I was alone with a dead man—a murdered man. The combination was a bit too much for me. I was afraid.

I arose to my feet and made a hasty exit to the hall, and in a second I was out on the veranda. There I paused for a moment to catch my breath and to think. It was still raining, though not so hard as it had been a few minutes ago. But now it seemed even darker than before, with heavy, thick clouds lying low in the sky. The light from the car, which split the darkness of the silent road, was the only thing that reassured me. Somehow that thin ray of light seemed cheerful and friendly.

I moved over to the rail, away from the door, not minding the rain that beat upon me. Two thoughts were running through my mind. There was no doubt that the man within the house had been murdered. The knife which was still between his shoulders spoke more eloquently of that than anything else. No one could commit suicide in such a manner. But what was he doing in the house? That it had been deserted, I could tell by the boarded-up windows. Yet the faint glimpse I had had of the room told me that it was furnished. The unkempt lawn, however, with its high grass that had brushed against my feet when I went up the walk, showed that for some time, at least, no one had lived there. But why had the front door been unlocked?

A sudden resolution came to me. To be honest, I did not care to reënter the house; yet my association with Bartley was one reason why I knew I must. Then, again, a man had been murdered, and there was the possibility that I would be able to find some clew that would lead to the discovery of the murderer. Somewhere in the car was a flash light, and under the seat was a revolver. One would give me the light I needed, the other the protection. Yet, as I hurried down the steps onto the pebbled walk toward the car, I wished, with all the

zeal I could muster, that I had chosen some other route to return to New York.

Only a moment was required to find the gun and light, and I hurried back to the veranda. The gun I held tightly in my hand, but, as I came to the door, I paused and listened before I flashed on the light. Though I waited several moments, I heard nothing; all was still within the house, not a sound came from its gloomy depths. The hall loomed dark before me, seemingly stretching silently into a vast distance. As I peered into it from the half open door, I shuddered, as I thought of the man who lay in the silence beyond.

I pressed the button of the light, and it flashed a circle of brightness at my feet, falling on the floor and the edge of the door. Then I saw what had kept the door open, despite the wind that had been blowing. A book, with a rather gay jacket, lay between the edge of the door and the sill. The door was swinging slowly, moved by the wind, but it could not close. I gazed at the book a moment, though I did not pick it up. It looked very much as if some one had placed it there in order to keep the door from closing.

As I entered, I turned the light down the hall. It was a long hall, which seemed to divide the house. A hatrack and a table of some kind were along one

side, while a couple of chairs were placed on the other. Several doors, which were closed, led to some rooms, though what they were, of course, I did not know. The hall ended in a winding stairway that led up to the second floor. But there was one thing I noticed, as the light fell upon the furniture; the chairs, table, and hatrack were covered with thick dust. The house had evidently not been lived in for a long time, perhaps for some years.

Rather slowly, for I did not like the task before me, I went down the hall, pausing at almost every step to listen. I realized, of course, that, if the murderer were still in the house, say in the upper story, I would make a fine mark for him, standing in the hall, with the light in my hand. But, though I stopped every foot or so, I heard nothing. There hung a deep silence over the house, one that was heavy with evil, that seemed sinister and perverse—a silence that once more caused the feeling of fear and dread which I had first felt creep over me.

I paused at the entrance of the room and threw the light into every corner, sweeping it from one end of the silent apartment to the other. I did not expect to find anything there, nor did I. As the yellow ray rested upon each bit of furniture, I saw that at one time the room had been a parlor, one of the old-fashioned type. Old hair-covered chairs

stood in their proper places; a large walnut table occupied the center of the room, and a few steel engravings were on the walls. There were even several books upon the table, their covers musty with disuse. Only one thing I saw rather puzzled me. Directly opposite the door, on the other side of the room, was a great wall mirror. Its gilt frame was faded with age and black in spots, but the surprising thing was the mirror itself. It was broken—broken right in the center, the glass shattered as if from a blow.

I took this in for a second; then my eyes turned to the floor, and again I saw the object that I had put off looking at as long as I could. There, a few feet from the door, lay the body of the man, his legs in a queer position, one arm hidden from my sight. I stepped within the room, and I could see, as I kept the light on the still figure, the knife that protruded between the shoulders. I stood looking at the still face. It was the face of a man of about forty-five, with dark hair and a rather prominent nose. As I flashed the light over the features, I noticed that his ears were very large, much larger than the average man's, and that he was clean shaven. I dropped on my knees by his side, and then for the first time I noticed the other hand, the one which had been hidden by the position of

the body. In it was clasped an automatic revolver.

This put a new complexion on things. My first thought was that the man had been suddenly struck down from behind. Why—and, above all, the reason for his being in the empty house—was more than I could even guess. But the revolver threw a new light on the crime. The man must have been struck down from behind, the position of the knife showed that. But he must have had a moment's warning, or else he had been suspicious when he entered the house. The second surprise came when, after a moment's investigation of the gun, I found that one shot had been fired.

Rather soberly I rose to my feet, and once more I threw the light around the room. The murdered man had fired one shot, where and at what I did not know. I decided not to spend any time in trying to find out. My first task was to notify the police in the town that lay about a mile away. But, as I turned to leave the room, it came to me that I ought at least to look in the other rooms. I was pretty sure by this time that there was no one in the house, but still I might find a clew.

The rather brief search proved to be in vain. The rooms leading from the hall turned out to be a dining room and a back parlor, and there was one room the door of which was locked. The two rooms

were furnished, and in each the dust lay heavy and undisturbed. A kitchen in the rear, which I did not enter, simply throwing the light over the room, completed my search of the first floor.

I hesitated for a moment at the foot of the long stairs which led to the second floor, then went up. Halfway there was a landing, from which the stairs ran in two ways to the upper floor. Reaching the second floor I found myself in a hall that stretched to the front of the house, with two doors on each side. These were all locked but one, and that proved to be a bedroom in the same undisturbed condition as I had found the rooms below. The search had been very far from complete, but, brief as it was, there had been found nothing out of the way.

For a second I stood at the head of the stairs before I descended, trying to figure out what it all might mean. That the man had been murdered was, of course, clear. Why, and for what reason, I had not the slightest idea. Why the deserted house should be used, was more puzzling. The thought flashed over me that perhaps he had been asked to come there. But of this I was not sure. Dismissing all idea of trying to fathom the mystery I had found, I started down the stairs. My first duty was to notify the police.

As I went out into the air, I found that the rain was over, and it had become a bit foggy. Through the faint mist flared the light of the car in the road. When I reached its side I looked at it a moment, wishing it had never stalled on me in the particular spot it had chosen. But it had; and, perhaps, if it had not, the crime would not have been discovered for many days. I climbed into the machine, more in order to place the flash light under the seat than for anything else, and in some manner I stumbled upon the button of the starter. With a sudden roar the engine started into life.

I knew I swore at the sound, not because it was unpleasant, but at the perversity of engines in general. A short while before the starter had refused to start; now, when I placed my foot on it by accident it had worked. But the noise of the engine sounded good, for it meant that I would not have to walk down the muddy country road to the town.

Slowly the car started to creep down the hill, slipping from side to side in the mud. Whatever had been the trouble with the engine before, it was going all right now; so half slipping, half driving, I crept along till I reached a bend in the road. I saw the first electric light of the town a few hundred yards away. It was a welcome sight, and I half

grinned at the friendly lights shining through the mist.

In a moment I was running past the first light, over a smooth pavement. I had hoped to find a policeman at once who would direct me to the police station; but, as I drove along, there was none in sight. In fact, the town seemed larger than I had thought it would be. The street I was driving down was wide, with great trees lining each side. Through them I caught glimpses of well-kept lawns and large houses set back from the road. Far ahead the lights seemed to be brighter, and I judged that I was approaching the business section. Once there, I should have no trouble in finding the police station.

Several moments later I swung over the car tracks and turned into a rather well-lighted street that ran down a slight incline. Stores, mostly small, it is true, were on either side of me, and I passed the gayly lighted fronts of several picture houses. Then came a large square, evidently the center of the town, with a bank on my right and a white church with a tall steeple on my left. I knew that in the country towns the court house, the jail, and the police station often occupied the same building and, as a rule, faced the town square. If it were so here, I should find it in a moment. About a

second later I saw a dim electric sign that read "Police Station."

I stopped the car before the great building—a building with the usual columns in the front—and started toward the door under the sign. It was in front of the door that the first thought came of the position I might be in. I was about to enter a police station in a town where I did not know a soul, to inform the chief that a murder had been committed. What he might think of my story I hardly dared to guess. But it had to be told; so pushing open the door, I entered.

The room was a large one, and over by a desk sat a man smoking and reading a newspaper. He gave me a glance when I opened the door, and waited for me to speak. I judged he was a police officer of some kind, and in the city we would have called him the desk man.

"Is the chief around?" I asked.

Rather languidly he motioned to a door that was on the other side of the room and went back to his paper. I might want to see the chief, but he had no interest in it. I crossed the room and started to place my hand on the knob of the door, when I heard the rumble of a voice from within. Some one was either talking or reading, but, as I heard

no answering voice, I pushed the door open and entered.

I had done it so softly that the man seated in a chair, with his feet stretched across to another, did not hear me or glance up. He was a big, raw-boned individual, with a rather large, though not over-intelligent face. The large, shining silver badge on his coat bore the word "Chief" in letters large enough to be read across the room. In his hands was a large heavy book, and he was reading in a rough, uncultured voice:

"Let me have men around me that are fat,
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights.
Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look.
Such men are dangerous."

It was the chief of police and he was sitting in a back room reading Shakespeare aloud.

Just as he finished the word "dangerous," he must have sensed my presence, for he looked up and gave a start. His face flushed a little, and he brought his legs down with a bang on the floor, dropping the book on the desk. He had an inquiring look in his eyes as he turned toward me. No doubt he was wondering who I was and what I wanted.

It took me only a few moments to tell him what I

had found. He listened, his eyes growing big with surprise. Once or twice his gaze traveled over me, as if he half doubted my story and wondered who I was. But he kept silent till I finished; then he asked:

“And where might this house be where you say you found a dead man?”

I described the road as best I could. When I spoke of the boarded windows, I saw by the look in his eyes that he knew the place.

“You know the house?” I asked.

He nodded. “Sure, its the old Yard place. But it’s all locked up, and no one has lived there for a dozen years.”

His eyes went back a bit regretfully to the book he had been reading; then he turned and gravely looked me over. He had a likable face, and in his blue eyes there lurked a hint of humor.

“Sure you have not been seeing things?” he inquired. “The booze nowadays is bad stuff.”

I shook my head, informing him there could be no mistake as to what I had seen—that back in the lonely house there was a murdered man. He listened soberly enough; then he rose from his chair and started for the door. As he passed me, I heard him say in a low voice:

"Awake! Awake!

Ring the alarum bell—murder and treason——"

Without speaking a word to me, he passed into the other room.

I had seen in my time many queer police chiefs, but never before had I run into one like this—one who read Shakespeare aloud and quoted him. I smiled, as I pictured Bartley's amusement when I should tell him how my story had been received. But my next thought was what I should do. The chief had passed from the room without saying a word to me. I could tell from his manner that he half doubted my story, and, as I thought of his remark that the house had not been lived in for a dozen years, I hardly blamed him. But what did he expect me to do?

I half started to leave the room, when he suddenly returned. He had taken on a more energetic air and bustled into my presence with a little show of importance. He spoke when he had but reached the door:

"I have telephoned to our coroner, Doctor Remington, and he will be here in a moment in his car. If your car will hold another man, I will go with you, and the doctor can take one of the police officers."

I nodded, assuring him that the car was roomy enough for both. He hustled over to his desk and, opening a drawer, took a revolver from it, placing it in his pocket. He informed me that the house was just within the town limits, and that brought the affair within his jurisdiction. He said nothing more, and I could not but wonder. He had not asked any question as to who I might be. Instead he acted as though it were the usual thing for strangers to rush into his office and inform him that a murder had been committed. Neither had he asked for any description of the man. As I looked at the chief, I came to the conclusion that he had been so startled by my story that, for the time being, he had little thought for any questions regarding myself.

Suddenly there came the shrill shrieking of an automobile horn outside. The chief started from the room, motioning for me to follow him. In the outer office he spoke to a policeman who must have entered since I passed through the room. He then went out into the night, the policeman and myself following him.

There was a large car drawn up by the curb, in which I caught a glimpse of a young man. The chief went over and held a short, low-whispered conversation with him, and I heard the voice of

the doctor, as I judged it was, in reply. The chief then returned to my side and followed me into my car. The doctor's car started first, and I followed it down the road, retracing the route I had taken a few moments before. We were soon out of the town, for the doctor was driving like a fiend. We left the lights of the town behind, and up the slippery road we went at a far faster speed than I had come down a while ago. It seemed only a few seconds before both cars were standing in front of the place for which we were headed.

Silently we got out, and I gave a little shudder, as I saw the dim form of a house through the darkness. We all stood a second looking at it. It was silent, dark, and eerie. For a moment we looked, and then the chief took one step toward the path. As he did so, there suddenly broke in on the silence the most dismal howl that I have ever heard. It rose and fell, rising at the end on a high note that trembled away into the silence. Somewhere near the house there was a dog, with his nose raised to the dark sky, pouring out his soul in a howl of horror.

It was so horrible a note, that for a moment it must have unnerved us all. The chief hesitated, half saying something under his breath; and then, as if gathering his courage, started for the house.

I followed, the doctor bringing up the rear, with the policeman next to him. The chief had provided himself with a powerful flash light, and, as we followed along the wet path, the gravel crunching under our feet, he threw the light in a sweeping gesture in front of him.

We reached the veranda and there, as we came up the steps, we saw the dog. Just what kind of a dog it was I did not discover, for I never saw him again. But it was a fair-sized dog, coal-black, crouched up against the side of the house, with his nose raised, whimpering in the air. And one glance was all I needed to discover that the dog was afraid, deadly frightened, in fact. His tail was tight between his legs, his body was trembling, and his nose was raised toward the black clouds in the sky. He half slunk to the porch floor when he saw us, and his eyes gleamed under the light that the chief turned on him. But as the chief reached forth his hand to grab him, he gave a low growl, that was half a whine, and dashed from the porch and around the house.

I saw the doctor give a little shiver, as he said: "Good Lord! It would make you think of a devil." But no one else spoke.

By the open door of the house we stood a moment, and the chief asked me in what room I had seen the

body. I told him, and he brushed by me into the hall, we following. The hall was still deserted, and, as the combined lights from the electric torches of the doctor and the chief traveled down its length, I saw that it had not been disturbed since I left. But we did not stop; instead we passed to the room where the murdered man lay.

As the light swept over the still figure on the floor, there broke from the chief's lips a single "Ah." No one spoke or moved. The sight of the figure on the floor had been too overpowering. I saw the chief give me a sudden look. What it meant I did not know, but I had the idea that up to this moment he had but half believed the story I had told him.

The doctor broke the tension by dropping on his knees beside the body. His long, nervous fingers made a quick examination, while the chief's light played over them both. I saw that the doctor could not have been over thirty. His face was a boyish one, and though the lines were tense now, one could tell that his lips were the sort that smiled. Upon the lapel of his coat I caught the glint of a button, telling of service overseas.

It was not till he half turned the body over that he spoke, and then it was with a sudden start. His voice was eager, and excited, as he cried:

"Why, chief, this is James Culver!"

"What!" came the chief's half disbelieving voice. "It can't be; he has been away the past six weeks, and he is not expected back for some time yet."

The doctor rose to his feet and stood silently looking at the dead man. Then he half drawled: "Maybe it can't be, but it is."

The chief flashed the light over the face. It was the face of a man of about forty-five or fifty, not a pleasant face, but one that told at once the man had been accustomed to having his own way. It was a cruel face, with something ruthless about it—clean shaven, with a very prominent nose, and about as large a pair of ears as I have ever seen. But it was the eyes that held me. They were not only wide open, as are the eyes of all people who meet death suddenly, but there was a look of surprise and fright in their staring gaze, as if that last look, before death had blotted all away, had been one of mingled horror and astonishment.

Who the man was, of course, I did not know; but the doctor knew, and the chief, too. And from what they said, they seemed far more surprised at discovering who the murdered man was than that a murder had been committed. I judged it was a townsman, and, from what the chief had said, one who was thought to be away. But I knew nothing

else, and, as the chief went through the pockets of the clothes, I tried to puzzle the thing out.

When the chief rose from his examination of the contents of the pockets, his very manner seemed to change. His voice became crisp, his manner alert, and the air of boredom he had worn was dropped. He turned to me.

"Tell us how you happened to stop here."

As briefly as I could, I told of the car stalling, and how I had come to the house, hoping to be able to telephone for help; I told of entering the house and what I had found. The doctor and the chief listened without a word till I finished, when the chief suddenly said:

He paused abruptly.

"You say your car would not go. Yet you seem to have got down to town in it, and it brought us up here."

I explained how I had stumbled on the button of the starter, and how surprised I had been when it had responded. What they thought of it, I could not say, for their faces were in the shadow, and they said nothing. The only response was the reply of the chief, and the tone in which he spoke was such that it left me wondering.

"It was lucky you were able to start it again."

The next thirty minutes were spent in a search of the house. They did not try to enter the rooms that were locked, though I would not have expected that to be done. However, their search revealed nothing. Everywhere there was the same deserted air, the same dust of years, showing that the house had not been occupied for a long time. But as for a clew to any one's having been in the house—they found none. In fact, as we came down the stairs, the chief said that perhaps the man had not been killed in the house, after all.

When we reached the main floor, the chief called the doctor to one side, and they held a whispered conversation. All that came to my ears were the last words, "I will send some one right up." Then he came to my side and asked me to take him back to town.

The ride down the wet hill was a silent one; the chief said nothing, and I had no reason to talk. True, I wanted to ask him his opinion of what he had seen, but something told me it was better to keep silent. It was not till we swung round the courthouse and stopped in front of the police station, that the chief said anything, and then it was simply to ask me to come in with him.

The news of what had taken place must have got out, for, when we entered the station, the room was

hazy with cigar smoke and half filled with men. The chief motioned for me to go into the back room, and all eyes were turned curiously upon me, as I followed his suggestion. I closed the door behind me and sank into the nearest chair, trying to think. The attitude of the chief did not please me. He had not cared to talk, and I would have given a great deal to know what was running through his mind. I soon found out.

The door opened, and he came in, throwing his hat on the desk. He fingered the pages of his Shakespeare a moment, then turned:

“What do you expect to do next?” he asked.

“Well,” I replied, “my first idea is that I will go to a hotel and put up for the night; I suppose you will want me at the inquest.”

He gave me a curious look, his face heavy and expressionless, and his eyes traveled all over me. Then he said solemnly: “Young man, you have come in here with a tale:

“ ‘Murder most foul, as in the best it is;

But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.’ ”

I could agree with this, but the unnatural thing to me was to hear him quote Hamlet. But I said nothing. Again his grave look traveled over me.

“You come in here with this tale of murder, and

it's murder all right," he said soberly, "but I don't know you from Adam himself, and that story of your car stopping sounds queer. The only footprints we found in the house are those from your muddy shoes on the stairs, and"—he paused a second—"there is the blood on your coat sleeve."

I gave a startled look at the sleeve of my coat. There on the right sleeve, a little above the cuff, was a large spot of blood dried and black, it was true. The blood must have got on the coat when I bent over the body. The sight of it held me speechless.

Again the chief looked at me. "'Murder most foul,'" he began to quote, then paused and added: "Young man, you won't need a room in a hotel tonight. This is a pretty good jail, and I have lots of spare room. So I am going to keep you under my eye till the coroner's jury and the district attorney make up their minds what to do with you."

Half stupefied by amazement at the unexpected turn things had taken, I looked at him in astonishment, unable to speak.

"Yes," he said, nodding his head, "you are going to stay right here a while. Maybe you don't know anything about that murder; then, again, maybe you do. But I am taking no chances. That's a pretty fast car you have out there, and I am going to keep my hands on you, while I have you."

CHAPTER III

A NIGHT IN JAIL

FROM the beginning I had expected that I would be held as a witness at the inquest, which I knew must come. I had even thought that my story might seem a bit incredible, but I had never thought for a second that I would be suspected of the murder. Yet this was what the words of the chief seemed to imply. A look at his serious face, a look which he returned gravely, caused a sinking feeling to rush over me. My sudden arrival, combined with the story I had told and the sight of the murdered man, had been too much for the chief.

I started to protest, but with a gesture he slowly shook his head, as he said:

“Now, I don’t say you killed that man, don’t think that you did; but you come in here and tell me a wild yarn, and there is blood on your clothes. If I let you go, with that fast car of yours, you might be hundreds of miles away in the morning. Then what would they say—what would they think about me?”

I half started to answer his question. I could see his position, and I recognized how weak my own was; but he gave me no time to speak, answering it himself.

"They would say, 'Where is that young man who found the body? Why did the chief not keep his hands on him?' And then where would I be?" he asked as he threw out his hands in a gesture.

Suddenly I liked the man. There was something about the honest face in its open simplicity that appealed, though I could not help wondering why he had been chosen chief of police. Yet I had the idea he was far from a fool—that he was one of those fast-disappearing Yankee types whose looks give little hint of their real shrewdness and ability. Would that the type might live!

Rather earnestly I told him who I was. I spent some little time in telling of my connection with Bartley, and of Bartley's commanding position in his field as a criminal investigator. If he had ever heard of his name, he did not show it. Instead, his face remained expressionless, though his eyes did not leave my face. I tried to convince him how absurd it was to think I knew anything about the crime, and I grew eloquent as I tried to explain what a laughing-stock it would make of both of us when it came out that I had been held as a suspect.

When I had finished, he half smiled. "I'd rather have them laugh at me," he said slowly, "than have them say I was an easy mark, and laughing won't hurt you or me."

He paused a moment, as if running over what he wished to say next, then added: "Now, all you say may be true but——"

I half started to protest, but, as he noticed my flushed face, he continued: "Now, don't get excited. I guess it is all true, but I never heard of that friend of yours, who you say is so famous, or of you. Suppose you send him a telegram, and if it's all as you say, he will take care of you."

"And in the meantime?" I questioned.

He studied the floor for a moment, then half drawled: "Well, in the meantime I will keep my eye on you, but I won't lock you up in an ordinary cell. The jail here is back of my house; it's really part of it. I have a room there, where you can spend the night, and I will be able to keep my eye on you."

I flushed, protesting: "But it will be the same thing."

He nodded. "Yes, perhaps; you know 'A rose by any other name——' " but he did not complete the quotation.

Some one called to him from the other room at

that moment, and, after first giving me a piece of paper for the telegram, he went out, closing the door behind him.

I moved over to a chair by the table and for several moments stared blankly at the sheet of paper before me. The position I was in was awkward enough, but I was not thinking of that. It was the sheer absurdity of it all. That I should be held under a half suspicion of murder, did not at first bother me. Suddenly the thought came to me, that it might be rather difficult even to prove that I was not guilty. I knew, when the story got out, with what glee my old newspaper friends would play it up on their front pages. No matter what happened, I was in for some very uncomfortable moments. So, cursing myself under my breath, I wrote a telegram to Bartley, one that told rather fluently the trouble I was in.

The telegram finished, I leaned back in my chair and stared moodily at the floor. I could picture what Bartley was doing at that moment. He would be in his library, looking over some recent importation from France. I could even see in fancy the flickering flames from the fireplace, as they cast weird shadows upon the walls. I could picture the Airedale sleeping in front of the fire; and Bartley's fine face rose before me. I half blushed when I

thought of the chuckle of amusement he would give when he read the telegram and discovered the predicament I was in.

Suddenly the door opened, and the chief returned. He had his hat on and informed me that we might as well go over to his house. I picked up the telegram, which I gave him, and followed him out into the other room. This time it was filled, and the smoke of cheap cigars and old pipes hung heavy over the group of excited men. Conversation suddenly ceased when the chief entered, and all eyes were turned curiously upon me as I threaded my way through the crowded room. Even before I closed the door, the excited voices broke out again. It needed no stretching of my imagination to picture what they were talking about.

As we reached the sidewalk, the chief informed me that there was a large garage around the corner. We climbed in, and, following his directions, I drove across the dimly lighted square, down past the white church, and ended in front of a large square building. The front part was a dwelling house, but the larger portion of the building was evidently used for a jail. Across the windows were iron bars, and no lights streamed from them. It looked gloomy and sinister. I drove the car into the garage opposite the house, and, after leaving

instructions to look for the trouble, I followed the chief out into the street. From the glances of passers-by, I judged that the news of the crime and my connection with it were now public property.

As we reached a side door, the chief motioned me to go up the steps ahead of him; I gave a shrug of my shoulders, as I obeyed, but said nothing. He pushed open the door, and I followed him into a large room where there was one man half asleep at a desk. He gave a start, as we entered, and rose to his feet, but the chief paid no attention to him. Motioning to me to follow, we passed from the room and up a flight of stairs and along a hall to a room, whose door he flung open, after he had turned on a light from somewhere in the hall.

I gave a hasty, but curious, glance around the room. It was very large, fairly well furnished, with a table and a number of chairs. The bed looked comfortable, and the linen was clean. But one glance at the window told me it was barred like the others. I was in jail, all right, however much the chief might try to say I was not. Still it was not a cell, and for that I was thankful. There were even several magazines and books on the table.

The chief noticed my glance at the window and, half apologizing, said: "This is the best I have.

We don't keep our prisoners here as a rule, but, as I told you, I have to keep my eye on you for a few hours, and it won't be so bad here. There is a man downstairs who will see that you are comfortable." He paused a moment, then added: "There's no way out of here except through the room we passed through, and there's a man there all night."

With that he went out, closing the door. For a while I stood in the center of the room, staring at nothing in particular. The more I thought, the less I liked the situation. The chief regarded my story with suspicion. He was taking no chances that I should get away, there was no doubt of that; for, though the chamber looked like a room in a cheap hotel, yet, after all, it was in the jail—a room, no doubt, used for favored prisoners, people with political pull. And then I began to wonder if he would send my telegram to Bartley at once. I knew my getting out depended on Bartley.

I went over to the window and looked out. It was a large window, but heavy, thick iron bars ran across it. Even if I had wished, I would not have been able to escape that way. And downstairs there was a man on guard. From the window I could see over the low roofs of the near-by build-

ings, though great trees shut off any view of the town. The rain had ceased, the moon was out, and its light, as it fell through the leaves of the trees, would under other circumstances have seemed beautiful. As it was, I had no interest in the moon.

For a while I stood there, hardly even thinking. Then going back to the center of the room, I unpacked my bag which the chief had brought from the car. This done, I hesitated as to what I should do next; I was not sleepy; in fact, sleep was the thing farthest away from my thought. Also, it was foolish to spend much time worrying over my predicament; it would not make things any better. So, dropping down in a chair, which I pulled over by the window, I began to think of the crime I had stumbled on.

The man had been murdered; there was no doubt of that. But the picture of the deserted house kept coming before my eyes. The doctor had said that it had been unoccupied for years; that being so, why had the dead man gone there, and how had he been killed? I remembered the shattered mirror, and I wondered if it had been broken by a bullet or a blow. If so, had the dead man seen his murderer? But the mirror was in front of him, and it was my idea that he had been struck down

suddenly from behind. The next thought was what he might have been doing in the house. Had he been called there to meet some one, or had he been followed? Then came another idea. Suppose some man and woman had used the deserted house as a place of meeting, and he had been followed and killed, by either a wronged husband or wife. These thoughts ran through my mind, till at last in disgust I gave up the idea of throwing any light on the crime.

Rising to my feet, I went over to the table and fingered one of the books. To my surprise it was a new mystery story by a well-known English writer, one that I had not read. I picked it up and went back to my chair and read for about an hour. But the book did not hold me, and at last I flung it aside. I wondered, as I placed it by, what the writers of English crime stories would do if they lost some of their settings. It was the usual plot—the old, half-ruined castle, the mysterious man that came to the village, the discovery of his death, a mysterious Chinaman and the usual love story. I smiled, as I thought of the cases on which Bartley and I had worked. There had been no castles, no love stories, no Chinaman, and no sea captains—nothing but hard work, with never a sign of hidden treasure.

Suddenly there came a knock at the door, and in surprise I called: "Come in."

The door opened, and the doctor came into the room. There was a smile on his tanned face, and he said, as he closed the door behind him:

"The chief was telling me what you said. I have read about your friend Bartley; in fact, I have his book on poisons in the office. I told the chief he was making a big ass of himself by keeping you under cover like this, but you can't move him." He grinned, took a chair, then continued: "You see, the chief was chosen for his position, not because of his brains, but because he belonged to a church and is honest. The churches here got into politics a while ago, and the chief is one of the results. I tried to tell him you were all right, but he is taking no chances."

He paused to light a cigarette and, blowing a smoke ring to the ceiling, smiled back at me. Under the light he seemed far younger than I had thought when I first saw him. His age could not have been over thirty-three, and his tanned face, reddened by the open air, bore no lines. It was a kindly sort of face—the face of one who took the best that life could give—took it with a certain sense of humor. His smile was friendly enough,

yet I wondered why he had come up to the room. He soon informed me.

"You see," he half drawled, "when the chief told me what you said to him, I remembered all that I had read of your friend Bartley. In fact, I saw him once."

"You did?" I asked.

He nodded. "Yes, one afternoon in Paris in nineteen-nineteen. I was having lunch in the Brassierier Lutatia, over in the Latin Quarter, and the captain I was with pointed him out; said he was something big in the secret service."

I informed him that perhaps he had seen Bartley, for he was in the secret service and in Paris in nineteen-nineteen. Both of us had eaten more than once at the restaurant he mentioned. Then I waited for him to give me an idea of why he had come in to see me. It turned out that his visit was not merely curiosity. Not only had he read Bartley's famous work on poisons, but he had also read the newspaper accounts of several of our late cases. He had tried to convince the chief that it would be all right to let me go to a hotel, but the chief had insisted that he had only my word for who I was, and he was taking no chances. So he had run up to tell me there was at least some one

in the small city who was friendly. Then came the startling thing. Lighting another cigarette, he said: "In fact I know you never killed Culver."

Of course I knew that myself; but in surprise of his positive statement, I asked: "How?"

"Well, according to your story it must have been around ten when you went into the house. The storm broke about then. He had been dead over an hour; the body showed that."

I thought a moment. "That would make his murder take place around eight-thirty?" He nodded his assent.

"Well," I replied, "it so happens that at fifteen minutes to nine I stopped for gas at a crossroads garage about fifteen miles back, and asked how long it would take me to reach here. The garage man looked at his watch, said that it was almost nine, and that it would take about an hour, because of the long hills that I had to go over."

He grinned. "That lets you out all right."

For a while we talked rather languidly on many things, none of which were of much importance. I was not sleepy, and so I was glad there was some one to talk to. But I was curious regarding the man I had found dead, and I asked the doctor to tell me something about him. He was silent several moments after my request, and his brow wrin-

kled, as if trying to decide just what to say. At length he answered:

"The truth is, I know very little about him; no one in the town does, for that matter. He came here about a year ago and bought one of the old places of the town. Where he came from I don't know. He seemed to have money enough, but he never went out anywhere. Spent most of his time in riding around the country, alone. He had a house-keeper, but he got rid of the one he had a while ago, and another came. He left town about six or seven weeks ago, and no one has seen him since—that is, not till you found him dead."

"Was there any family?" I questioned.

"Only a niece," was the answer, "and she was away at school. She came up here for a few weeks last summer, but he was away most of the time. He was her guardian, I think; in fact, she returned to town yesterday."

In answer to certain inquiries of mine regarding the family, he simply shook his head. He could not give me much information regarding the man I had found dead. He did laugh when he said he had the largest ears he had ever seen, with the long lobes that I had noticed; and I got a hint that perhaps the man had proved a bit quarrelsome in his dealings with the country people.

For a while we talked back and forth. The doctor seemed more curious as to what the man might have been doing in the deserted house. He informed me the house had not been used for years, that the place had been boarded up at least five years before. Why the man should have gone there, why he should have been away for some weeks, and then return, as he did, he could not understand.

I ventured a question: "Do you know if any one in the town saw him since his return?"

He was silent a moment, very thoughtful; then he shook his head. "So far as I know," came the answer, "no one knew where he went, or knew he had returned."

He paused, then added slowly: "But I had a strange experience to-night." I waited for him to say what it was, and in a moment he went on: "About half past seven I was coming in the west end of town from a call when I saw this man Culver walking along the country road"—he paused a moment—"at least, I thought it was he. Anyway, when I got up to him, I asked him if he wanted a ride; and what do you think he said?"

I shook my head.

The doctor made a little grimace.

"He never said a word, never even looked up—instead, struck into a field near by."

It seemed a curious thing, and I said as much.

The doctor agreed. "Yes, it did; and I knew the chap, treated him once when he was sick. Now, of course, it was getting dark; there was a storm coming; and the light was not good. I was pretty sure it was Culver, but he said nothing, simply struck into the fields."

"Did you see his face?" I asked.

He thought a moment. "Well, not exactly, but I am pretty sure it was he, all right, though he never turned my way or made any sign. I drove along, wondering why he did not speak—still, that was like him. He was a surly fellow at best, so I gave no thought to it, though I did wonder when he had returned to town, and why he was out in the country."

After that the conversation lagged a bit, and in a few moments the doctor said he had to go, and I escorted him to the door. Closing the door, I listened to his footsteps echoing down the stairs; then I dropped into a chair to think over what he had told me. There was nothing much of interest except the last thing he had said; his meeting with Culver, and the man's refusal to speak. That seemed strange, and it looked as if there were some mystery back of it, as if he had come back into town quietly and wished no one to know of his return. But why, of course, I did not know. While I undressed I gave

a few wild guesses as to what it might mean. I was still thinking of it when I fell asleep.

The sun was streaming into the room through the barred windows when I awoke in the morning. Despite the unaccustomed surroundings, I had slept well—a dreamless sleep that in itself showed how tired I must have been. Dressing, I began to wonder about breakfast, for a glance at my watch showed that it was after eight.

Just as I was brushing my hair, the door opened, and the heavy figure of the chief appeared. He looked solemn and glum, and his suit looked as if he had slept in it. For a second, as he glanced soberly at me, I wondered what he had been doing during the night, and if he had found any clues to the mystery. If he had, he gave me no information, for after a moment or so he said shortly:

“Better come with me and have some breakfast.”

Taking my assent for granted, he started from the room, and I followed him. We went down the passage, down the stairs and through a door which led into a dining room. He had taken me into his own home, and, as soon as we appeared a servant began to place the breakfast on the table, a table covered with a red-figured tablecloth. It was a typical country breakfast, heavy, yet wholesome, and there was even pie to finish up with. It had

been my impression that it was only along Cape Cod they had pie for breakfast, but I found that Vermont followed the same custom. Not being in the habit of eating pie, I turned it down and drank my coffee.

All through the breakfast the chief had sat across the table, not eating or saying a word; instead, he smoked a villainous pipe, with a tobacco that was the strongest I had ever smelled. Every little while, as I looked at him, I would catch his sober face stealing a glance at me, but he said nothing—that was, until I had finished. Pushing my chair back, I wondered what was to come.

I was naturally anxious.

Even then he said nothing for a while. At last he took the black pipe from his lips, allowed the smoke to weave around his face, and suddenly said: “‘By my troth, my little body is a-weary of this great world.’”

Shakespeare again, and it made me smile. The discouraged tone of his voice and the application of the quotation to a man that weighed about three hundred, was more than I could stand without smiling. Seeing the smile, the look of gloom on his face increased, and he said:

“Young man, the doctor says you could not have killed that man.” He paused, added shortly: “Never thought you did.”

That was comforting. Then suddenly, placing the pipe on the table, he took two cigars from his pocket and, after slowly turning them over and over in his hand, offered me one. But, suspicious of the brand, I suggested he try one of mine, which he accepted, after first looking at it very carefully. Lighting it, he took one pull, then said: "Must be a ten-center."

I stifled a chuckle, for they were two of the imported brand that Bartley had had shipped to his order from Cuba. But I said nothing, and then all at once the chief grew confidential. He pulled his chair up to the table, brushed aside a plate or two, and leaned forward, speaking in a friendly, but dissatisfied tone:

"Young man, it's been an awful night. You know, I was elected chief because the good people of the town wanted some one to enforce the laws. I am a good church member, but I don't know much about lawbreakers; never had many here except some booze runners. They knew I was honest and elected me to enforce the law honestly. But last night the sheriff and the county attorney and myself were up all night trying to find out about that murder." He made a gesture of impatience.

"What do you think the sheriff wanted to know this morning?" Without waiting for a reply, he

continued in a disgusted tone: "Asked me who killed that man Culver?"

He paused, his face getting angry; then, slamming his fist down on the table, he asked: "How do I know who killed him—how can I find out?"

He looked at me as if expecting an answer, and I slowly shook my head. Then he went on. "Here am I, the chief, and, just as soon as I get the place, we go and have a murder—and there has not been one here for fifty years. Then they come around and ask me who did it, and why don't I arrest some one?"

Again he looked at me, then continued: "How can I arrest any one? I don't know who did it."

His earnestness was so sincere, that I stifled back a little laugh. I could see the man was honest, but that the events of the past few hours had been too much for him. There had not been a murder in years, he said, and now with one to solve he was all at sea. He was silent a moment, then went on: "The doc told me all about that big detective you travel with. How does he find out who committed murders?"

I told him I could give him no information on that score, for it was pretty hard to tell how Bartley performed his apparent miracles. I knew he would understand nothing of Bartley's wide knowledge of

science, his mastery of psychology, and his keen mind. And then I wondered if he had received any answer to my telegram. He shook his head, after I asked him, and rather silently went over to the window; then, returning in a moment, he said:

"That's not all. Some one last night tried to break into Culver's house and did kill his dog."

"They did!" came my surprised voice.

He nodded assent, but gave no further information, simply growling something about all the crime in the world breaking the same night. Then, taking his hat, he said: "Well, we got to go over to the inquest. It's at the courthouse, and you will have to tell your story there."

CHAPTER IV

THE INQUEST

REACHING the courthouse, where the inquest was to be held, we found the street filled with automobiles parked close to the sidewalks. It was the typical New England courthouse, with four great white pillars in front, a high tower, and the usual town clock, which struck nine just as we ascended the steps. There were several persons standing around the front of the building, on the steps and the sidewalks, and all paused in their conversation to throw a curious glance at me, as I walked up the steps.

The courtroom was on the second floor, and we had difficulty in getting through the crowd that surrounded the door. Even when we got inside it was not much better, for the large room was packed till it could hold no more. Murders were not the usual thing, one could see, and it seemed as if every one had come out to hear the testimony at the inquest. Pushing our way through the crowd, we managed to get down to the front and passed the rail which marked the space set aside for the lawyers. Here

the chief found me a chair, then went up to the high bench, where the doctor was sitting.

I half turned and looked at the crowd which already filled the room to overflowing. People were even trying to get through the door, though the court officials were doing their best to keep them out. It was a rather mixed company. There seemed to be a great number of farmers, if one could judge by the wrinkled, unpressed clothes some wore; but most of the people were well dressed, and I even saw a minister seated in front. Curiosity had brought them out—that morbid streak in most people, which likes to hear of crime and sudden death.

The doctor was seated behind the bench where the judge usually sat, and I remembered that he was the coroner. At a table near by were a group of men that I judged must be lawyers, though the large badge on the breast of one of them showed me he was the sheriff. They were talking with their heads close together—an animated conversation, though what it was about I could not hear. Over the room was the murmured hum of conversation and the coughing that one hears in a crowd. In fact, some must have been smoking, for the air was faintly filled with the odor of tobacco. I thought how typical it was of the lack of serious-

ness in so many people, that these men—for there were few women present—were all apparently unconcerned over the fact that a townsman of theirs had met a sudden death. Suddenly the doctor rapped on the bench and said the inquest was open. The hum of conversation ceased in a second, and I could hear the people settle back on their benches. To them it was a show, and they were all ready to be amused or thrilled.

And right away something happened that I did not expect. There was a dispute between the town solicitor and the county attorney, as to who had jurisdiction at the inquest. There seemed to be some question whether the crime had been committed within the town limits or not; if it had been committed outside the limits of the town, it fell within the jurisdiction of the county.

The town solicitor, a young fellow with a rather good face, made a little argument, and he was followed by a heavy, thickset man with a very red face and a very loud voice. The county attorney was so earnest in his plea that the crime had not been committed within the limits of the town that all at once I could see there was something behind it all. Then I remembered the chief's statement about his election, by what he called the good people, and I

understood at once that the old political ring must be that of the county officials.

It seemed such a useless argument, of little value, but the crowd enjoyed it. They laughed at the rather heavy sarcasm of the county solicitor, and they applauded several things that were said. It seemed absurd to me; for, no matter where the crime was committed, in the end it would have to be the county attorney who presented any evidence to the grand jury. Finally, the dispute was settled by sending for a map of the town; and, when it had been brought in and studied, it was discovered that the house where the murdered man had been found was just inside the town limits. Yet forty-five minutes had been wasted in the foolish argument.

They had the system of coroner's jury in the State, and the twelve men were chosen and filed rather self-consciously, but at the same time rather pleased, into the jury box. After the oath they settled down in their chairs, with a very important air. I looked them over, half smiling, as I wondered if I would care to have my life in their hands. They were twelve average men, but it was hard to find one of more than average intellect, so far as looks go, in the group. However, there they were, ready to hear the evidence.

The chief was the first witness, and his face

was flushed, as he climbed into the chair. He was embarrassed, I could see, and the perspiration was standing in little beads on his face. I could even see his hands shut tight, and he looked as if he was afraid. In a rather low voice he gave his testimony, searching for his words, as if he did not wish to make any mistake in what he said. He told of my coming to the police station and of the story I told him. Then came the description of our trip to the house and the finding of the dead man, whom he identified as James Culver. And to my surprise, that was about all he said. He did not mention detaining me as a witness, or having any suspicion that I knew anything about the crime. For all of which I was very thankful. The attorney and the coroner asked him only if he had known that Culver had returned to the town, and he simply said, "No." That finished his testimony, and he stumbled down from the chair, with a relieved air on his face, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

My name was called next, and, as I seated myself in the chair and took the oath to tell the truth, I heard whispers go around the room, every one leaning forward to take a look at me. I was a stranger, and evidently they wanted to hear my story. I settled back in the chair and, as I waited for the first question, took a glance around the room. And

then suddenly, at the back of the courtroom, leaning against the door, I saw Bartley.

The sight of his keen, intellectual face, the contrast between his appearance and the rest of the people, was like a breath of sea air. I had been a bit troubled, but now all my cares were forgotten. There was an amused smile on his face, as he signaled a greeting to me—a smile that played around his lips and made his face very attractive. Though he must have traveled half the night to get here, yet his suit was as fresh as if he had never worn it before, and his manner was as cool and unconcerned as ever.

I was on the stand for a long while, longer than I had expected, and some of the questions fired at me made me a bit angry. The town solicitor was out for blood; evidently he wanted to make a good impression on the people present. He took me all through my story of the car stopping, of my going to the house for shelter, and of finding the body. But he overlooked something that might have been hard to explain; he did not ask how it was that the car had started again after I ran from the house.

All through the examination I could see that the people in the courtroom were regarding me somewhat doubtfully. At several of my answers there

would come little whispers, and once or twice they laughed at some sally of the attorney. But I kept my head; I had been under examination of lawyers far better than the young man who faced me, and after a while I was permitted to take my seat.

There seemed to be no way to reach Bartley, so I simply dropped into my chair by the lawyers' table and waited for what might come next. It proved to be the testimony of the doctor himself, whose story was short, but who did say that the man must have been killed around eight-thirty. The thing he did was to produce the knife by which the man had been killed and explain in rather technical language the wound which, he said, had caused instant death.

The knife was passed to the jury, and each one, as it went from hand to hand down the row of chairs, examined it. They gazed at it as if by looking they could tell who had committed the crime. The audience bent their necks this way and that, to get a better view, but I doubt if any of them succeeded even in getting a glance at it.

When the doctor went back to his seat, there came a pause, and then suddenly, after looking over some papers on the desk, he called: "Lorraine Sawyer." There came a hum of interest from the

crowded courtroom, as a door opened behind the judge's bench and a young woman appeared, going at once to the witness chair.

It was a very beautiful young woman we saw, as she sat there, with her cheeks a little flushed from the excitement—a young woman of about twenty, with dark hair and a wonderful cream-and-red complexion. Though she must have been embarrassed, yet her dark eyes met those of the doctor clearly and gravely. I wondered who she was, for the suit she was wearing had never been bought in any country town.

In a second I discovered. In answer to the first question after her name, she said that she was the niece of the dead man. She gave her testimony in a low, clear voice, never faltering for a word, nor hesitating for an answer. But it threw no light on the crime; in fact, it only deepened the mystery.

She testified that Culver was her guardian—her mother's brother. Her people had died some years before, and he was the only member of the family left. She had never seen him before he was appointed guardian, and, in fact, she had only seen him three or four times since. That was partly due to the fact that she was attending a girls' school in Washington. The previous summer she had been in the town for three days, but he was called away

two days after she arrived. The last time she saw him was a few months before, and then only for about ten minutes, in Washington. She had received a letter from him some weeks ago, asking her to spend the summer with him, but saying he would not be there when she arrived.

"You do not know where he was?" came the question.

"No; I received a letter saying he was called away on a business trip, but would be back around the tenth."

Since it was now only the seventh of June, the tenth was still three days away, though the term "around the tenth" might have meant that he would return before. But it was here that she volunteered a bit of information. She hesitated after her answer, then said:

"He wrote that his brother who had lived in England for some years was coming about then, and he wanted me to be here to meet him, in case he, himself, was delayed a few days."

"You never met his brother?" the attorney asked.

"No; I think he spoke of him once, but I never met him."

The questioning along this line was dropped, and then there came a silence broken by the coroner, asking: "Do you know if he had any enemies?"

The girl was silent for several moments, her eyes studying the tips of her shoes, then replied: "No; you see, I really knew very little about my uncle."

"Do you know what business he was in?"

She half shook her head. "Since he became my guardian I don't think he had any. I remember some years ago my mother said he was a broker, but where, I do not know."

This finished her testimony, and she stepped down to go out of the door from the room. Her testimony, as far as I could see, had thrown little light on the affair. She seemed to know no more about the man than I did, and that was nothing. But it struck me as rather queer that a niece should know no more about an uncle who was her guardian. Yet she was telling the truth; her whole appearance showed that.

The next witness turned out to be the last, and there was a little stir of excitement as the coroner called the name: "The Reverend Joseph Sparrow." Pushing through the crowded seats there appeared a little fat man with a full face. He was dressed in black, with a ministerial coat and a collar buttoned in the back. His whole attitude was very self-contained, that of one who at least realized his own importance. He took his seat in the witness chair, raised a soft, fat hand, as he took the oath, and then

pulled off his glasses and polished them with a very white handkerchief. In answer to the question as to his name, he said in a very important voice: "The Reverend Joseph Sparrow, pastor of the First Methodist Church."

He said that he knew, as he put it, the deceased, but his tone was one that gave the impression he did not approve of him. Asked how well he knew him, he said very slightly, and then volunteered that the acquaintance had been regrettable. This seemed rather astonishing; the coroner looked at him rather blankly a moment and then asked what he meant.

Again he polished his glasses and replied in a soft, sugary voice that he feared the deceased was a profane man of violent temper. Asked what he meant, he hesitated a second, then half blushed and said:

"I visited the brother shortly after he came—ah—suggesting that he might wish to make a contribution to the repairs we were making on the church. But his manner was very disagreeable, not at all that which you would expect to be used toward a minister."

He paused, as if satisfied at the answer. But if he was satisfied, the coroner was not; for he rasped out: "What did he say?"

The minister's face flushed even a deeper red, and, as if in protest, he raised his flabby hand in the air, saying: "Do not, I beg you, ask me to repeat his profane words."

Every one in the courtroom seemed to be curious, and they were leaning forward, as the coroner asked: "What did he say?"

The minister's face flushed, he started to speak, stammered something, then blundered out: "It's really very disagreeable. I sent in my card, and I was ushered into his library, and he asked me what I wanted? I told him, and he said——" The voice trailed into silence.

"What did he say?" came the question.

His face red, in a voice very low, the minister stammered out: "He told me to get to hell out of his house."

A burst of laughter came from the crowded room, and I smiled, myself, more at the look on the witness's face than at anything else. It took several loud raps with the gavel to restore order, and even then there came a loud laugh from some one, as if the humor of it had just struck him.

Order restored, the coroner asked: "Did you see him again?"

"Oh, yes, on the street several times, and I think last night."

The last answer was unexpected. No one had testified on seeing the man in the town before the crime. I remembered the doctor had said he saw him, but he had not testified anything about it. Like a flash came the question:

"Where did you see him?"

Slowly, as though realizing the importance of the answer and pleased to be the center of the stage, the pompous voice boomed out:

"Last evening I was returning from visiting a sister of the church, who is ill. I was entering the east portion of the town, when an automobile went past me. I am pretty sure the deceased was driving it."

I saw a startled look come over the doctor's face; I remembered that he had said it was in the west end of the town he had spoken to the man, who had turned into the fields without answering. In a rather serious voice he asked:

"What time did you see him?"

The witness thought a moment, replying: "Let me see: I had supper with the sister and her husband; it must have been around seven-forty-five when the car passed me." He paused, then added quickly: "Understand me, I only got a quick look at the man in the car, but I am pretty sure that it was Mr. Culver."

I studied the doctor's face, as the man gave this answer. He had seen him in the opposite end of the town at the same time. Both could not be right, for he could not be in the two places at the same time. When the minister left the witness stand, which he did after this question, I half expected to see the doctor go back and tell his experience in seeing the dead man. But, to my surprise, he turned to his papers instead, looked them through, and then announced that the inquest was over, that there were no more witnesses.

As the jury started to whisper among themselves, I sank back into my chair, puzzled. I had never been at a coroner's inquest where less testimony had been brought out. All we knew was that the man had been murdered, but nothing else—not a thing more. For all that I could see the inquest had been useless. I turned and glanced back at Bartley, managing to catch his eye. There was a little smile on his lips, but he seemed puzzled, also. Turning, I glanced at the jury, who had not left the room, but were crowded together, whispering in an excited manner. There was only one verdict that could be given, I knew that, and it seemed hardly necessary to spend much time in arriving at it.

Still, it was almost fifteen minutes before they

seated themselves, and the foreman rose to his feet. The conversation that had been general in the room suddenly ceased, as all looked at the tall farmer who stood facing the coroner.

In a loud voice he said: "We agree that James Culver was murdered, but we don't know who by." I started to smile at the odd way in which he had given the usual verdict, having omitted "person or persons unknown." Then his next words caused my face to redden with anger. In a slow drawl he continued: "But we're a bit suspicious of the story that man Pelt told, though we don't think he did it."

It seemed to me that a murmur of approval went through the courtroom at the last words of the foreman. They were unnecessary, and I had never heard of such an addition to a verdict. My face flushed, but, as I turned and found all eyes on me, I tried to appear unconcerned. It even seemed to me that there was a look of suspicion in the eyes that had coldly watched my every movement. The coroner's voice broke in on my thoughts:

"I will accept the verdict, but the last part of it will not be recorded."

With that he started to gather up his papers, and the jurymen stumbled out of their chairs and were excitedly talking with the spectators that crowded around them. I kept my chair for a moment,

hardly knowing what to do. Suddenly I saw Bartley's tall figure pressing through the groups of talking men. He did not pause by my side, but went to the coroner, with whom he held a low conversation. It was over in a moment, and he came at once to me.

I rose to my feet with a rather sheepish grin. He half laughed, as he patted my shoulder, his hand resting there for a moment with a friendly pressure.

"Well, Pelt," came the low, cultured voice, "I must say you certainly did yourself proud this time."

I shook my head slowly; there was nothing to say, and he laughed. "It's not every day a man gets partly accused of committing murder."

Then, seeing that my feelings were a little hurt, he smiled again, saying, "Don't worry; let's be going."

"Going?" came my astonished voice. "Where?"

"Why, Pelt; don't you know that one of my best friends, and one of yours, has his summer place here? You have heard 'Billy' Thayer speak of Chester again and again. It's where he retires every year to write his masterpieces. We are going to stay with him a few days."

All at once I gave a groan. Billy Thayer was the well-known novelist, and hardly a week passed in the winter that he did not drop into Bartley's house

in Gramercy Park. I had heard him speak of Chester again and again, and repeatedly he had urged us to spend a few weeks with him. But my excitement over finding the dead man had driven all thought of the name of the town from my mind. If I had only thought of it a few hours before, perhaps I might have been spared my night in the jail.

I said nothing, as I followed Bartley through the crowd that still lingered, talking, in the courtroom. Many were the glances cast at me; and, though all conversation ceased, as I approached, it was quickly taken up when I passed. It was with relief I reached the street and climbed into Bartley's English runabout.

He seemed to know where to go, for he asked no directions of any one. As we were running down the main street, I asked him how it was he had reached Chester so soon.

"I left," he grinned, "as soon as I got your cry for aid. I think I broke all speed records during the night, but I got here in time for the inquest."

We had reached the outskirts of the town, and I saw that there were many summer estates surrounding it. In the distance the mountains, their tree-covered sides looking cool and fresh, circled us. Great trees arched the road we drove over, and large white houses set in green lawns were on each

side. As we passed, I got a glimpse of children playing under the trees. Suddenly I asked the question I wanted Bartley to answer:

"What do you think of that inquest?"

There was silence a moment, then the reply:

"Well, Pelt, there were a good many things about it that struck me as strange. I never heard less evidence, less light on a crime, than this morning. No one seemed to know anything about the murdered man."

We had turned up a driveway that led to a white house set several hundred yards from the road—a house hidden partly by great elm trees, with a closely cropped lawn running to its veranda. Before we reached it, Bartley, with a mocking smile, turned to ask: "Where did you spend last night, Pelt?"

"In jail," came my mournful answer.

He threw back his head and laughed, and, seeing my face, laughed again. Just as we stopped before the house, he said: "There is another thing that made this inquest very remarkable."

I stole a look at his face—a serious face, though his eyes were dancing. Not sure of his answer, I asked doubtfully: "What was that?"

He brought the car to a stop, and for a second watched a man run down the steps toward us. Then in a serious tone he answered: "It's the first

time I ever was at an inquest where my closest friend was practically accused of knowing who committed the crime."

And with that he turned to greet his friend, Thayer, who had reached the side of the car.

CHAPTER V

BARTLEY TAKES THE CASE

CERTAINLY Thayer did not look like a novelist, though I really do not know just how a novelist ought to look. His short figure and the fat, round face, burnt a brick-red by his outdoor life, caused most people, when they first saw him, to think he was a gentleman farmer. In that idea they were partly right, for he spent most of the year on his place in Vermont, living outdoors every moment he could spare. The queer thing to me was the fact that upon his two acres of land, in sight of the Green Mountains, he wrote his wonderful sea stories that had made him famous. During the winters that he spent in the city he had been a Saturday-night visitor in Bartley's library.

He gave us little time to look around his house, for lunch was waiting, and in a few moments we were in the dining room. Through the open window by my chair I could look down across a long expanse of fields, green under the June sun, to the mountains that stood only a few miles away. The hills were not high, but the regularity of their tree-covered sky-

line made a soothing picture, with a touch of beauty that much higher mountains lacked.

Lunch over, we went out for a smoke on the wide veranda, shaded by the great elm trees of the lawn. We sat silent, and it was Bartley who broke the stillness by asking:

"What are you writing about now, Thayer?"

His friend gave a little laugh. "You will be surprised if I tell you I have been trying to dope out a mystery story. Want to give me some help?"

Bartley chuckled, adding that mystery stories were a bit out of Thayer's usual line. He agreed to this, but said: "I have been reading for several years the various reviews the critics have given mystery stories. They have a lot of fun with them—that is, most of them. Out of curiosity I started to read some of the yarns that were reviewed. I found most of them were better written than the critics gave credit for, and the average writer of mystery stories was putting in as good a piece of work as any other kind of a writer—but most of them never got any credit for it."

Bartley laughed. "That may be so; our friend, Pelt, you know, wrote one a while ago. He told the story of one of my cases, and he bored me to death while writing it. He rewrote the darned thing five times, used a good bit of our newer

psychology, solved the mystery in a way never before used in such a yarn—and then what do you think the critics said?”

Thayer shook his head, and with a grin at me Bartley continued: “Well, they solemnly wrote that the book had never been revised, never mentioned the one odd thing that solved the mystery, and overlooked every bit of real work he put into it.”

Thayer straightened up, with a look of seriousness on his face. “That’s what I found in those I read,” he said. “Then I decided to try my hand at one just for the fun of the thing, but——” Here he shook his head sadly.

“What?” I asked.

He laughed. “Well, I found it was a harder thing than I had thought. It was a different kind of writing than I had ever done. The thing had to be logical, like a problem in logic. It had to be reasonable, no hidden passages, no secret stairways, no missing wills, and the like. Then it had to be swiftly moving, and every single thread pulled up at the end. I discovered also after a while that there were hardly any new situations, only a new twist could be given—that murders were mostly alike.”

He paused, and Bartley took up his thought: “That’s all true; murder itself is almost always the

same, but every case is different. Take the one last night."

"You mean my next-door neighbor?" interrupted Thayer.

It was the first I knew that the murdered man had lived next door to Thayer. Instinctively my glance traveled across the lawn to the house that I could see through the trees, a few hundred yards away. It was a dark-brown house, partly hidden by the trees in front. The house sat several hundred feet from the road, and a high iron fence surrounded it. I noticed the lawn was not kept up, the grass being high, and several flower gardens were filled with weeds. There seemed to be a dilapidated look about it.

Observing my glance, Thayer said: "Yes, that's where Culver lived. I heard this morning that he had been found murdered in an old house about a mile from the village."

"Is that all you heard?" questioned Bartley.

"No, they say that some young fellow came into the police station with a wild yarn about finding the body, and that it is thought he was the murderer."

Bartley gave me a look that caused my face to flush, and at my expression he laughed. Then he turned to Thayer and told him I was the person who had found the body. There was an amazed

look on the writer's face, as he listened, and nothing would do but that I should tell in full detail all that had happened to me. When I finished, Thayer was silent for a moment and lighted a fresh cigar before he spoke.

His cigar going well, he said: "You know, Culver lived in the next house, but I knew little about him. He came to the town about two years ago, and it was very rarely that any one saw him on the street. He had a niece who came up once or twice from school. I think they said he was her guardian. But none of us here knew him." He paused to add: "Funny thing he should be killed; no one even knew he was back. He had been away somewhere for the last six or seven weeks."

Suddenly Bartley remarked: "Thayer, you want the plot of a mystery story. Here it is, right on your doorstep."

The writer looked at him as though he did not just see what he was driving at.

Bartley continued: "The first situation, namely, the finding of the dead body in a house no one lived in, is old and has been used in detective stories. The rich man who comes to a small village and lives the life of a recluse, is not uncommon in fiction. If you want a plot, here is one for you, and this time it is a real murder you have to solve."

Thayer shrugged his shoulders. "That's the trouble," he said, "it's true."

"Well, truth is a stranger thing than fiction," was Bartley's answer. "You writers have to stick to probabilities; the truth never does."

Thayer started to answer, when suddenly we heard the telephone ring, and, excusing himself, he rose and went into the house. He returned in a moment, saying in a half-surprised tone that the call was for Bartley. Rather mystified, I watched Bartley go into the house. It was some time before he returned, and then he walked to the edge of the veranda without speaking.

When he turned, he said: "Thayer, the chief of your police has asked me if I would go up to the house where they found Culver's body and look the place over. A county detective is going with him. Inasmuch as Pelt has got mixed up in this thing, I feel that I ought to aid in clearing him of any suspicion. After the fool verdict that coroner's jury gave, there are many people who will think he knows something about it. So I told the chief I would go. How would you like to drive up with me?" He paused a moment and drawled: "It might give you some color for your mystery story."

Bartley's remark had relieved my mind of the one thing that had been troubling me. I knew

that, unless they found the murderer, there would always be a suspicion in the minds of some people that I knew something about the crime. Though I was surprised at the chief's invitation to him, yet I was very glad that he had accepted it. Even Thayer seemed very keen, as he put it, "to get mixed up in a murder." In a few seconds we were in Bartley's car, and a moment later out on the road. There was little said during the ride, and it was only a short time before we stopped in front of the police station.

As we entered the door, I flushed under the glances that were cast at me by the three men who were in the room. Back of the desk sat an officer, who told us the chief was in the rear room. A knock on the closed door was followed by the command to come in. Pushing open the door, we entered. The chief rose from his chair to greet us, and it was with a very solemn air that he turned to me. I introduced him to Bartley, but he did not need an introduction to Thayer. There was another man present, smoking a vile cigar, whose smoke hung heavy over the small room. He was tall and very thin, and he reminded me somewhat of the pictures of undertakers that one sees in the humorous magazines. His name turned out to be Kelly, and he was the local detective.

The chief bore a half-apologetic air toward me, explaining that he had discovered that what I had said about Bartley and my connection with him was true. But, as he said to Bartley, "What could you do, when a man you never knew came in and told you there was a murdered man not a mile away? I had to keep my eyes on him."

Bartley agreed with this, laughing; and then for a few moments they talked together. The contrast between the keen, intellectual face of Bartley and the heavy features of the chief was very striking. As I glanced at the chief, I doubted if he would ever be able to solve the crime. But for some reason he was paying great respect to Bartley, listening eagerly to what he might say, but saying little himself.

It was Bartley himself who suggested that they might as well start for the house where the crime had been committed; a proposal the chief greeted by reaching for his hat, which was on the desk.

There was another machine in front of the station, into which the chief and his detective entered, and in a moment we were following them down the street. As we retraced my route of the night before, I saw that the town was much larger than I had thought. Like all New England small cities, there were a great many trees, and the streets ran

under a green canopy of arching branches. The houses were set back from the sidewalks, with large lawns in which were gardens, bright with many-colored flowers. Though there was a certain sleepy air about the town, yet there was also an appearance of wealth and a certain air of refinement.

We soon left the town and began to climb up the long hill. The woods ran almost down to the town limits and started at the very side of the road: thick, heavy woods, with underbrush piled in disorderly manner around the trunks of the trees and a high growth of bushes. Even in the daytime the woods would prove difficult to get through, and at night they would be almost impassable.

The first cleared space turned out to be several fields. As our cars stopped in front of the house, I saw Bartley give it a careful look. In the light of the bright sunshine the place looked more forlorn than ever. It stood about fifty feet back from the road, and the yard was littered by the broken branches of trees, with the grass high and unkempt. The house itself, perhaps, had once been painted, but the paint was worn off, and boards were missing in several places. There were two chimneys, but the top bricks had been blown off by storms, and both were far out of plumb. The windows were still

boarded, and the whole place had an abandoned appearance.

Behind the house was a barn, in worse condition even than the house. The barn door was half gone, and great gaps, with the boards missing, allowed one to see the dark interior, where I saw the ruins of a carriage. A smaller building, a storehouse of some kind, stood between the barn and the house, but it also was in sad need of repair.

Silently we followed the chief up the walk, and I gave a shudder, as I thought of my experience of the night before. The house was gloomy enough in the daylight, but it had been much worse in the dark. From all appearances it did not seem as if any one had lived there for years. In fact, in answer to a question of Bartley's, the chief replied that it had been deserted for at least eight years, and he had no idea who owned the place now.

The door, which had been found open when I went on the piazza for shelter, was now closed, but the chief produced the key and opened it. We all stood silent a moment, peering into the hall; then, with the chief in the lead, we entered. As we came to the open door of the room where the man had been found, Bartley suggested that it might be a good thing to rip the boards off one of the windows to let

in some sunlight. Kelly, without a word, went outside to do this.

The room was of course dark, because the three windows were boarded, and we waited several moments, while Kelly pulled off the boards nailed across the largest window. As they fell away, the sunlight for the first time in years streamed into the musty room. Going over to the window Bartley raised it; then he returned to the door. For a second he stood glancing around the room.

I had been able to gain only a brief look at its contents the night before. The furniture was old, and dust covered the chairs and the table, which were in the center. The pictures were old steel engravings, their frames faded with age and the glass streaked and dirty. A large gilt mirror hung over the mantel, and the gilt was black and worn off in spots. And again I noticed that the glass of the mirror was shattered, as by a blow. For a moment Bartley stood, taking it all in; then he turned and asked where the body had been found.

Both the chief and myself pointed out the position. It had lain only several feet from the door, facing the mantel. We explained the position, then told of the knife between the shoulderblades and the fact that a revolver had been found in the hand. He listened silently, turning to glance at the door from

the hall, then back at the mirror. Suddenly he went over to the old square piano that stood in a corner and called us in a second to his side. As we crowded around him, he pointed to a half-used candle which stood on an old book.

"That explains at least one thing," he said. "I wondered just how any one would have been able to see in this room. There are no electric lights that could be turned on, and there is no sign of a lamp. Whoever was in the room last night had to see."

"It was dark when I came in," I ventured, "not the slightest sign of a candle."

He paid no attention to my remark, but turned to the chief. "Did Culver know his way about this house?"

The chief looked puzzled and turned to his tall detective, who quickly replied: "So far as I know, or can find out, Culver never was in the house. It's been boarded up for five years. I don't think Culver ever was up this road. Don't know, of course, but he hardly ever was seen on the streets of the town."

Bartley gave a little shrug of his shoulders, turned and glanced at the door; then he walked over to the mirror and examined it a moment. Turning to us, he explained: "I was trying to picture what happened last night, and I think I know."

"You do?" broke from the surprised lips of the chief.

"Yes; there seems to be only one thing which could have taken place. Culver was standing near the door—let me say that likely he came into the hall, came carefully and rather suspiciously. He came to the open door and looked into this room. There was a light here—the candle. Suspicious, he held his gun in his hand."

Thayer broke in: "How do you get that, John?"

"Because of this," was the answer, as Bartley opened his hand for us to see an object that was in his palm. We bent lower to look. There in his hand was a bullet. For a moment we all looked, and there was a wondering expression on the chief's face, as he waited for the explanation.

"You see the broken mirror," said Bartley. "The glass is shattered in the corner, and this is what did it. I have no doubt you will find it fits the gun which was found in the dead man's hand. If so, that shows us at least one thing."

"What's that?" asked Kelly.

"I said that Culver stood looking into the room, his gun in his hand. He was suspicious; if not, why should he be holding his gun? He looked into the room; the light showed it was empty; then he stepped within, but I think he was still suspicious.

Suddenly, as he stood there, he saw the murderer, the knife in his hand, and fired, smashing the mirror."

"But why should he smash the mirror, if he saw the man who killed him?" came Thayer's question.

"Because," came the answer, "what he saw was the figure of the man in the mirror. You notice the mirror is directly facing the door from the hall. Culver was standing two feet from the door; behind him, silently creeping up on him, was the murderer. Shall we say that suddenly Culver raised his eyes and saw that figure in the mirror? Remember, the room was only dimly lighted; he could not see plainly. Without a moment to think, instinctively he fired—fired at the figure, only to smash the mirror. The knife was buried in his shoulders at almost the same time the shot rang out."

I saw Thayer give a shudder, as he turned and looked gravely at the door and then back at the mirror; I was not surprised at what Bartley had said, for I had figured myself that it had been a shot that had broken the glass. But I saw a rather doubting look on the face of the chief. He glanced soberly at the mirror and slowly shook his head. Seeing his gesture, Bartley added:

"The bullet I took out of the wooden frame of the mirror. You can very easily prove that any one entering this room from the hall will have his figure

reflected in the glass. I noticed it as soon as the boards were knocked from the window. If I am right, it would suggest something else."

"What's that?" came the eager question of the detective.

Bartley was silent for a moment before he spoke, and then he said slowly: "You must understand this is simply theory. But we have to start with some kind of a theory, and it seems reasonable. You have said, Kelly, that you doubt if Culver ever was in this house before his death and——"

The man broke in on him: "I don't know for sure, but I doubt it. This place has been boarded up, and then, as I said, Culver hardly ever left his own place."

"Well," continued Bartley, "if that is so, then we can suppose that Culver had an appointment with some one here. The place was picked out because there was no chance of any one seeing or knowing about it. He was suspicious; he carried a gun, and when he entered the house he had it in his hand. Evidently he did not trust the person he was to see. Reaching the house, he saw no one. He entered, came along the hall, stopped at this room where he saw the light. Still he had seen no one."

"How do you make that out?" Thayer inquired.

"He was struck down from behind. I doubt very much if he saw the murderer till he observed him in the mirror. Yet it must have been some one that he knew."

"Mr. Bartley," came Kelly's eager voice, "that dope is all good, but we might suppose he was going to meet some one he knew, and it was all a blind to get him."

Bartley nodded in agreement. "That is true, Kelly. At least, when he came here, he thought he was going to see some one he knew. He would not come up to this lonely spot under any other circumstance. I think his first sight of the murderer was in the mirror, when he suddenly fired. He must have done that because he saw the murderer with upraised arm, knife in hand, as he stood behind him."

He paused a moment, then said soberly: "But that does not answer any of the other questions—why Culver came here, why he was murdered, and by whom?"

Suddenly in a low voice the chief quoted:

"Let's further think of this—

Weigh what convenience, both time and means,
May fit us to our shape."

Then he became silent.

Bartley threw him a startled look, as though he could not believe his ears. Then I saw a faint smile come over his lips. I had not informed him of the chief's propensity for quoting Shakespeare, and the quotation must have been rather a surprise. But after a glance at the serious face of the chief, Bartley managed to keep back his smile.

A rather long examination of the room did not reveal anything of interest. Bartley in the end came back to the door and stood for a moment glancing at the floor. Suddenly I saw him stoop down to pick up a small piece of paper that was half hidden under a rug. Glancing at it, but without showing it to any of us, he placed it in his pocket.

From the parlor we went to the other rooms. They were dark, because the windows were boarded up, but a flash light sweeping every inch showed that nothing had been disturbed. One room was locked, and there came some little argument between the chief and Kelly as to whether they should break open the door. But, after a careful examination of the lock, Bartley informed them that the dirt and dust which filled the keyhole showed that no one had tried to enter the room.

In the kitchen nothing was discovered till Bartley tried the door that led outside. It swung open to the touch. He turned to the chief. "Did you try this door last night?"

The chief nodded. "Yes, it was unlocked."

Whatever the information might have suggested to Bartley, he did not inform us. Later he went from the kitchen out into the hall and up to the second floor. The three rooms that were locked showed no signs of being disturbed, the keyholes being filled with dust and dirt. And the one room that was open revealed nothing of importance.

Thayer had watched Bartley with great interest, and as we came down the stairs and out into the hall, he whispered to me: "I don't think he found a thing, do you?"

I shook my head in agreement. So far as I could see, there was not the slightest kind of a clew, and Bartley had discovered nothing that I had not known the night before. As we came out into the bright sunlight, and he turned and glanced back at the hall, I saw a puzzled look on his face. But he could not be more puzzled than the chief and his detective. What they had expected Bartley would find, I could not tell. But I was sure they had hoped that he would be able to find some clew which they had over-

looked. And, so far as I could see, the visit to the house had resulted in nothing.

As Kelly locked the door, and we started down the steps to the yard, Bartley asked: "Did you find anything in the man's pockets?"

The tall detective shook his head, replying: "No, Mr. Bartley—that is, hardly anything. There was a bill fold, but no money in it, simply a letter and three or four cards with Culver's name on them. But we did not need the cards to identify him. His nose and the big ears and bushy hair gave him away."

Bartley made no reply, and we started for our cars. At the battered fence the chief drew him aside, speaking in a low voice, but rather eagerly. I could see Bartley nod several times in agreement, yet I could not hear what the conversation was about. The chief got into the car which Kelly had turned around while he was talking, and they started down the hill, as we climbed into ours.

For a moment after we seated ourselves, Bartley was silent. Then he turned to his friend to remark: "You wanted a good plot, Thayer. Here it is. You could not ask for a better start for a mystery story. All you have to do is to solve the mystery."

"Yes," grunted the writer. "All—that's enough."

Bartley nodded; and then, just as he was reaching to turn on the gas, suddenly gave a start. He turned to us with a half-sheepish look.

“By George, there is one thing I overlooked.” And he started to climb out of the car.

CHAPTER VI

KELLY MAKES AN ARREST

WE followed Bartley back into the yard, up the path that led to the house. On the edge of the piazza he seated himself and, taking his cigar case from his pocket, offered us each a smoke. He said nothing until he had lighted the long thin cigar; then he turned to Thayer. With a wave of his hand, one that included the whole landscape, he asked: "What does all this suggest to you, Billy?"

Thayer looked at him a bit puzzled. Before us under the warm sun the woods stretched down to the city, about a mile away. Miles across, on the other side of the valley, were the hills, silent and peaceful, a solid mass of green. The yard in front of us was filled with weeds, and yet the daisies, white splotches of color in the tall grass, outnumbered them. In the farther end of the yard were a few decayed apple trees that would never bear any fruit. A broken stone wall separated the yard from the next field. Beyond this field the woods started.

Evidently Thayer thought Bartley's question referred to the condition of the small farm, for he simply grunted back: "It's in a damnable state."

Bartley laughed at the answer, then became serious. "I don't mean that, Thayer, but the crime that took place here. You are a writer of fiction, and your imagination ought to be working well. What do you think about it all?"

Thayer was silent a moment, turning to give the house and the barn a long look, as if he expected to find something; then he replied: "I don't know, John. It struck me, when we were in this house, that it was just the place for a murder. But why did Culver ever come up here? I got to thinking, as you spoke, perhaps he had a secret appointment; but, if so, the person who asked him to come here must have known the house pretty well. Perhaps they had a quarrel."

"There was no quarrel," came Bartley's quick reply. "If ever a murder was premeditated, this one was."

"Why are you so sure of that?" came the question.

"Because," he answered, "of several things. I told you how I thought the man was killed—by the murderer creeping up behind and suddenly stabbing him. I don't think that Culver, when he got into the house, ever saw the person he came to

meet until he saw his dim reflection in the mirror. Now, if that is so, then he was brought to the house to be killed. He was a bit suspicious; the gun in his hand showed that. And yet, here is the question: if so suspicious, then why did he come to this lonesome spot?—for he must have known the person he was going to see.”

Thayer nodded his agreement with this, saying slowly: “How did the murderer get away, and—oh, lots of things?”

Bartley rose to his feet, throwing his cigar in the grass. “That’s what I came back for,” he answered. “I wondered if the murderer used a car to get away with, where he was when Culver got to the house, and how he got here? Then it dawned on me that we had failed to look at the barn and other buildings.”

With that he started around the house to the decaying barn. The remnant of a carriage, the wheels broken, with one wheel off, was in the building, and that was all. Then he passed on to the shed, but that contained nothing of interest. Back of the barn a rail fence separated the yard from a field of grass—a field that stretched away to another field, where the woods started. He stood a moment glancing rather soberly at the grass, which was waving under the slight breeze; then he climbed

over the fence and, with a sign to us to follow, started through the field. He went rather slowly, reached the fence at the other side—a fence broken and half down—climbed over into the second field, and in a moment had reached the wall by the road.

We were standing where there had been some kind of a path—one that led from the road into the field. The bars which once formed a gate were lying on the ground, broken and decayed, and the tall, thick grass had grown over the path. It was here that Bartley stood for a moment, going in the end to the road before he returned to our side.

Pointing to several tracks in the dirt and to places where the grass was broken and matted, he said: "There was a car in here last night."

From where we stood we could see the tracks where a car had driven in from the road, sinking a little into the mud. The grass for a few yards was pressed down, as though some heavy object had run over it. There seemed to be no doubt that a car had been in the field at some time, not many hours before. But whose? That was the question.

As though reading the question in my mind, Bartley said: "You remember, Pelt, the minister at the inquest this morning told of seeing Culver in a car last evening. It may be he drove up here, ran the car into the field where it would not be seen

from the road, and then went to the house. There was a car here last night, the marks of the tires are in the dirt, and it was a small car."

"But," suggested Thayer, "if Culver did that, then the other man, the one that killed him, must have known the car was here and drove away in it later."

Bartley's brow knitted at this, and he glanced moodily at the road. "That is true, Thayer; he must have known it was here. If it was Culver's car that was in here, he certainly never drove it away—he was dead."

He spent some time searching in the high grass, as if hoping he would find something, but with no result. After a little while he walked down the road to the house and climbed into the car. It was getting toward dusk when we reached Thayer's house, and, after leading us into his library, he excused himself for a while. It was a large room, and the setting sun was streaming through the wide windows. Upon the walls were scores of prints and etchings, many of them several hundred years old. The built-in bookcases lined all sides of the room, the dark-red and blue covers of the books making a pleasing color scheme.

Bartley was in his element in a library. He went from case to case, pausing for a while to finger lovingly some particular book, then passing to the

next. The books ran mostly to the unusual in type. Science, anthropology, book after book of myths and folk lore, filled one side of the room. The cases on the other side were filled to overflowing with volumes of memoirs and history. There was very little fiction, and that mostly European. One could tell that it was the library of a literary man, though one might be surprised to know that the owner was the best writer of sea stories we had.

Bartley at last finished his examination of the books and stood thoughtfully looking at the prints. Directly in front of him was a rare etching of Sophie Arnould, that one which gives the sad and wistful expression to her beauty. For a while he studied it, and I could tell he was thinking of the story of her life. Turning to me he said thoughtfully: "She was called the wittiest woman of her day; unmoral, as they all were then. There must have been a wonderful charm about her that made her one of the best-known women of her time—unmoral, beautiful, witty, and with the heart of a child. You read the story of her age in her life."

"I presume every man who has seen that picture and knows her story wishes he had known her," came the voice of Thayer, who had come into the room in time to hear Bartley's remark.

Bartley nodded to this; then, seating ourselves,

Thayer and his friend entered into a long conversation, mostly about the eighteenth century literature of France, a subject in which both were very much at home. I listened for a time, smiling at several of the stories of that day which Bartley retold. After a while I rose and strolled out on the piazza. Finding an easy-chair I lighted a cigar and sank back to run over in my mind the details of the crime.

The more I thought of it the more puzzled I became. The first point was, of course, that Culver had been murdered: no one knew by whom, or what the reason might be. There had been hardly any money found on his person, so robbery might have been the motive. But here, again, I became bewildered. Why should Culver have gone to the old house, and what had drawn him there? Had there been an agreed meeting, the old house chosen because it was never used? Then again, where did they get the key? Kelly had said the key was found in the front door. If the murder had been committed by only one man, than either he or Culver must have had the key. I made a mental note that I would attempt to discover the owner of the house. As far as I knew, not a single clew of any kind had been found. This was my conclusion, unless the chief himself had found something. But, remembering the chief, I doubted it.

I decided that it was about as mysterious a murder as I had ever known of. Another and far more disturbing thought came over me. I flushed a little, remembering the concluding words of the coroner's jury. Yet, if the murderer was not discovered and that quickly, then more and more would I come under suspicion. Public opinion never needed much to go on at any time; I knew that; and, unless something was done to solve the mystery, then there would be a good many people who would suggest that I knew more than I had told. And I had no reason to think that the crime would be solved very soon.

I was engaged in these moody thoughts when Bartley came on the piazza to tell me it was time to wash for dinner. Remarking about my somber face, I told him of what I had been thinking. He admitted there would be people who would have a suspicion of the story I had told, but, as we entered the house, he placed his hand on my shoulder, telling me not to worry, as he would endeavor to aid the police to the extent of at least showing that I knew nothing of the crime.

We had dinner in an inclosed breakfast room. From my seat I could look down across the fields to the mountains a few miles away. Under the growing dusk they seemed to have become larger, with

darker shadows hovering over them. The air was still, and from some spot not far away there floated to my ears the cries of children at play. A road stretched, a streak of brown, through the fields, till it vanished over the top of a distant hill. The whole scene was restful, and I could well understand why Thayer said it was the only place where he was able to write.

Dinner over, we went out on the veranda and sank into chairs for the after-dinner smoke. For a while no one spoke, and it was Thayer who first broke the silence. He took his cigar from his lips, blew a large smoke ring which he watched seriously a moment, then turned to Bartley.

"John," he said, "I have been thinking of this crime. It strikes me that whoever did it covered up his tracks well. That he left no clew of any kind seems to show he was pretty clever."

"Well," came back Bartley's answer, "that depends. There is an old Italian proverb that says, 'The devil shows how to make the cup, but not the cover.' That applies to crime. Murderers are never satisfied with what they do. They always do something with such marked singularity that it attracts attention. Often it is shown by the excess of precaution that is taken. Now, there is no doubt this crime was very carefully planned."

"How do you make that out?" came Thayer's question.

"Because," was the reply, "of the place where it was committed, more than anything else. If Pelt's car had not stalled right in front of the door; if it had not been raining, and he had not gone to the house for shelter, it might have been weeks, maybe months, before the murder was found out."

Thayer was starting to reply, when he heard the sound of a car stopping in the driveway. We had been so busy talking that none of us had observed the car, as it drove up, but at the sound we turned to see who was coming. It was a rather battered flivver, dirty and sadly in need of new paint. However, there was no doubt who the man was that jumped out and started toward us. Kelly was so thin and so tall that even in the approaching darkness I recognized him before I saw his face. I wondered what had brought him to the house. No doubt it was to see Bartley.

He greeted us a bit shortly, but, as he took the cigar which Bartley offered, I could see that he was excited and rather pleased over something. There was a little gleam of triumph in his eyes, and the slow, deliberate way he lighted his cigar told me he was going to make the most of his moment. He waited till the cigar was going to his liking, and

then he said, in a voice which, under the studied effort to be calm, showed his real feeling: "Well, I just made an arrest."

Bartley gave him a look, but said nothing; and it was Thayer who asked: "Who, and what for?"

Kelly needed no invitation to tell his story. He even threw his cigar away and bent forward in a tense manner in his chair. He clasped his long arms over his knee and in a hurried voice said:

"You know, we found one small pocketbook or bill fold, on Culver. Nothing much in it, a few cards, a letter or two, and about seven dollars; but we got the other pocketbook about an hour ago."

I saw Bartley's eyes turn to him, and he asked: "Where did you find it?"

Kelly swept on: "Funny thing about that. Have to tell you the yarn. Seems last night some of the young people were having a dance up at Potter's for some of the students that are home from college. There was a few of them staying the night there; they called the thing——" He paused, fishing for the expression.

"A house party," I suggested.

"Yes, that's it. Well, there was a young fellow by the name of Sheldon staying the night there, the guest of young Potter. He lives over in Ripley, about twelve miles from here; goes to the same col-

lege Potter does. About nine he gets a call on the 'phone, and then suddenly he left the house without saying a word to his friend or any of the bunch. They saw his car go out on the road toward the town. He did not come in till about eleven; and when he did they kidded him a bit, but he did not say anything about where he had been. He was a bit excited, they told me, and jumpy."

He paused and fished in his pocket for a cigar and, finding one, lighted it. For several moments he did not say anything, and Thayer rather impatiently asked: "What's the big idea?"

"Wait a second till I come to it," was Kelly's reply. He seemed to have some kind of a climax coming, and again he bent forward eagerly. "Well, this morning they heard about the murder and were speaking at breakfast about it, when this kid came down, and right away he loses all interest in food. He got as white as a ghost, wanted to know all about the murder, where they found the body, and if they knew who did it. He was very excited—every one noticed it. About eleven young Potter saw him trying to sneak out in the garage, so no one could see him. A little curious, Potter followed and peeked through a window. Sheldon went to his car, took something from it, placed it in his pocket, and went out of the garage down into the

orchard. Potter followed him and saw him hide the thing in a hole in one of the trees. After Sheldon had gone back to the house, Potter went to the tree, reached into the hole, and came out with a pocketbook."

There came a pause, and then he went on: "He told his father what he had seen and found, how he had followed Sheldon; and his father examined the pocketbook. After looking at it he made him come down to the station and tell the chief and myself the yarn."

"And the pocketbook belonged to Culver?" came Bartley's quiet voice.

"You bet your life it did!" was the reply. There was his name stamped on it and some cards and letters in it, also seventy-five dollars in money."

"What did you do then?" Bartley asked.

I saw Kelly grin, as he replied: "Beat it right up to the house where Sheldon was, and I arrested him."

"What did he say?" some one asked.

"He was a pretty scared kid. First he denied hiding the pocketbook, next he said he found it, and then suddenly shut up like a clam. In fact, he would not say why he left the house, where he went, or anything. Simply said he found it."

He leaned back in his chair and threw us a well-satisfied look. I could tell he thought he had found

the murderer, and I could hardly blame him. Why the young man should hide the pocketbook, and how he happened to have it, unless he knew something about the crime, would be hard to explain. Yet for some reason I wondered. I cast a glance at Bartley, but his face was expressionless. As if surprised that we did not speak, the detective asked: "Well, what do you think of the yarn?"

"What do you?" Bartley shot back.

"Me? Why, I think that young chap killed him. He must have thought that no one would find out anything of the murder for some time, and when he heard at breakfast about it, his first thought was to hide that pocketbook. If he did not kill him, why try to hide the pocketbook?"

He paused and waited for some one to agree; and, since no one said a word, he burst forth again: "Oh, it seems as clear as anything you can ask for."

"Yes," came Bartley's cool reply, "it seems clear enough; I agree with you that it's very odd the boy should have that pocketbook. But why should a young college boy commit murder?"

Kelly threw him a glance of triumph. "Listen to what's coming," he said. "The kid was broke, dead broke, and his father had refused to give him any money. He kept him down to an allowance of five dollars a week, and he paid for the gas he used

in his flivver. Why, only at dinner last night he said he was 'so broke that for ten dollars he would kill a man.' "

I saw Bartley throw out his hand in a gesture of disapproval, but the detective swept on, his voice confident: "I take it that he killed him for the money he thought he would have."

"But," came the slow voice of Bartley, "you have to assume a lot of things. You say no one knew that Culver was in town—he had been away weeks. You have to assume that boy knew he was back, and also knew he would be in the old house. Now, that seems a bit absurd. You state that the house has been closed for years, no one ever in it, windows boarded and doors locked. How did that boy know Culver would be there—how did he know he had returned?"

Stung a little at the criticism of his theory, the detective spoke in a little higher voice than before. "Know?—why, there was that telephone call. Maybe Culver called him up."

Bartley shook his head. "But you don't know that," he said. "And, anyway, why should Culver call the boy on the phone?"

The detective rose to his feet and stood towering over us. His voice was eager, as he replied: "I don't know, but there is another thing I found."

"What's that?" asked Thayer.

Slowly, as if wishing to impress us, he replied: "I found out to-night that Culver owned that house where we found him murdered."

"Owned it!" came my startled reply. "Why, I thought——"

He broke in on me: "Yes, he bought it about three weeks before he went away."

CHAPTER VII

WE HEAR MORE ABOUT CULVER

FOR a moment there ensued a silence which no one cared to break. Kelly's statement had been startling and unexpected. We had been told that the deserted house was part of an estate, and it had been closed for many years. Culver was a comparative newcomer in the town, a man who kept to himself and made no friends. One of the mysterious things about his death had been the fact that his body had been found in the old house. Now we had been told he had bought the place only a few weeks before he went away. Why he should have done this was something that I could not understand.

I could see a puzzled look on Bartley's face, one that suggested several conflicting emotions. It was his voice that broke the silence by asking: "Are you sure of that, Kelly?"

The detective nodded. "Yes, and I was knocked off my feet when I heard it. Lawyer Green stopped me on the street and told me that, about seven weeks before Culver went away, he dropped into his office

and asked him to buy the place for him. Did not want anything to get out about his owning it and did not wish the deed recorded for the present. But he bought it and got title to it."

"But," asked Thayer, "why should Culver want that old place? As I recollect, there was some story about the place."

"Sure," nodded Kelly. "Years ago there was a murder there in the barn, and, two years after that, old man Yard hung himself in the same barn. The family moved away, and no one would buy the place." He paused, grinned, then added: "Folks said the place was haunted."

"But why should Culver buy it?" persisted Thayer.

Kelly slowly shook his head. "Search me—I can't tell you, but he did buy it; there's no doubt about that."

All at once I remembered Bartley's statement that Culver had been stabbed from behind, and that he had fired at the figure he had seen in the mirror. It had been suggested that he was not familiar with the house; that if he had been, he would have known the mirror was in front of him. But, if he owned the house, he must have known the mirror was there, and that it was a figure in the glass that he saw. We had also wondered who had furnished the key which

had unlocked the front door. Culver's owning the house explained why he had been able to get the key—of course he would have it. But Bartley had suggested that the dead man was not familiar with the house at all. That was the reason why the murderer had been able to creep up from behind to kill him. Yet here was Kelly, telling us that Culver had bought the house, and if he did, then naturally he knew his way around in it. But why had he bought it?

As if in answer to my questions, Bartley said: "It seems rather queer, Kelly, that Culver should be the owner of the house where we found him murdered. It's rather odd he did not wish the deed recorded right away, which shows he wished his ownership kept a secret. But why he should buy that old place is something we do not know. Of course no one seems to know anything about Culver himself, why he lived here, what he did, and, above all, why he kept himself aloof from everyone."

He turned to Thayer. "Did you know the man?"

Thayer laughed. "Hardly that, John. I have spoken to him a few times when I saw him in his yard. But he never was friendly. I know his niece much better. She came over several times and borrowed books from me, when she was up here last year."

"Was Culver here at the time of her visit?"

Thayer was silent a moment, as if trying to think. "I believe he was," he said at last. "It's my impression he went away just before she came."

A curious smile came over Bartley's face, and, taking his cigar case from his pocket, he carefully selected one of his long, thin cigars and deliberately lighted it. He watched the smoke curl away in a thin blue streak, then turned to Kelly.

"I suppose you will let me talk with that young man you arrested?"

"Sure," was the reply. "But I think there is no doubt he is the criminal."

Bartley gave him a long look, saying slowly: "Kelly, you may be right, then again you may be wrong. The boy seems to be in a bad fix; yet there is a chance he may be telling the truth. He may have found the pocketbook; you cannot prove he did not. If he did, then, frightened at hearing of the news of the murder, the thought that he might be suspected would cause him to try to hide it. It seems to me almost too simple a solution to say that the boy committed the murder."

Kelly half shrugged his shoulders, as if wishing to give the impression that it might all be as Bartley said, but for his part he had his doubts. For a while the conversation lagged, and at last Kelly rose, saying he would start back for the town. As he reached

the edge of the veranda, Bartley called to him.

"Kelly, you say that no one knew Culver, that he was barely ever seen on the street. Now, I think if you will look around, you will find that people knew more about him than you imagine. This is a small place, and the fact that he kept by himself and made no friends would cause folks to talk. People would become interested in him, watch when they saw him on the street, and observe everything they could. I would not be surprised if you found that people had seen him about far more than you think. If I were in your place I would keep my ears open, listen to the gossip of the town, and you may find out something."

Agreeing there might be something in what Bartley had said, Kelly left us. He went out to the drive and a moment later was turning out into the road, his engine protesting noisily, as he disappeared. As the sound of the engine died away, Bartley turned to us.

"You know," he said, "often the very means a person takes to divert suspicion from himself are the very things that turn it on him."

"Suspicion?" asked Thayer in an astonished voice.

"Yes, suspicion," answered Bartley. "There seems no doubt Culver came up here to—shall I say hide himself? He keeps off the streets and has little to do with the people. Naturally, in a small country

town, this fact alone would attract attention. When he first came, people would ask who he was and where he was from. Seeing that he avoided them, they would begin to watch and to talk about him. I have little doubt that people know more about what Culver did here than he figured."

At that moment the telephone rang, and Thayer rose to answer it. We heard his voice float out through the open windows of the library, and in a short time he returned. He did not seat himself, but stood leaning against the rail of the veranda, addressing his remarks to Bartley.

"John," he said, Jim Slater just called up. He is a lawyer here, the best in the place—college man and a great book lover. He comes up to my place every week, and he has often heard me speak of you. He just told me that he handled Culver's affairs here, and something very puzzling has been found. He is over at the house now with Culver's niece and suggests that you go over, if you will. The girl also is anxious to see you."

Bartley rose to his feet with a laugh. "Well, Thayer, I guess I had better go. I have to get our friend Pelt back into the good graces of the public." He paused for a moment, then added: "Besides, this affair begins to interest me."

We followed Thayer down the steps, across his

lawn and out to the road. You could not jump over the fence into the next yard, because it was a wire fence at least ten feet high; so we were forced to go around by the road, then turn into the yard through the gate.

It was a large yard, with many great elm trees, the leaves of which made it rather dark and gloomy. The house itself was a rambling old place, set several hundred yards from the road, with a huge veranda that stretched around three sides. A gravel walk led through the trees, with a privet hedge on each side. The wind was rising a little, and the sound of the branches above our heads was like the murmur of water on the shore.

As we crossed the veranda to the door, I noticed that the lights seemed to be on in all the front rooms. Thayer rang the bell, and we waited silently for someone to come. It was opened at last by a fat negress, who held the door only partly open until she looked us over. As if reassured, she flung it wide, and asked us into a large hall. Leading the way, she took us halfway down the hall, then knocked at a closed door before her. At the command to "Come in," she flung it open, and we followed her into what seemed to be a large library.

For a moment my eyes saw only the long rows of books upon the wall, the bookcases rising almost to

the ceiling. The books were dark and faded with age, and the library must have been an old one. In one corner of the room was a rather large safe, which looked very much out of place among the old mahogany furniture with which the room was furnished. A large desk drawn before a great divan was in front of the fireplace, in which, even though it was June, a small wood fire was blazing. I also noticed that every light in the room was on.

Standing in front of the fireplace was a man with a keen, intellectual face. The only singular thing about him was the fact that, although he was a young man, his hair was snowy white. The white hair, with the athletic appearance of his body, made a curious contrast. As soon as we entered, he came over to us, greeted Thayer, and was introduced to Bartley and myself. It was Thayer's friend Slater, who seemed very pleased at meeting Bartley, and he remarked that Thayer had spoken of him again and again.

Suddenly I noticed the girl who had just risen from the divan, where she had been sitting. It was the girl I had seen in the court room—the niece of the murdered man. In the courtroom I had thought she was beautiful, but now in some kind of a house dress, which clung to the lines of her fine figure, I saw that she was a very beautiful girl indeed. Her

eyes, however, looked tired, and, I thought, anxious. Somehow I got the impression that she was afraid. I may have been mistaken, yet there seemed to be a trace of bewilderment, mingled with fear. But, if so, during the introduction, which she acknowledged in a musical voice, it was not evident.

The divan was large, and we all seated ourselves on it, except the lawyer, who stood before the fire looking down on us. He had a fine face, the lines around his lips showing that he had a sense of humor. He seemed puzzled, as though he had run into a situation that was beyond him. No one said anything, for it was evident that the lawyer had something to tell us. As I waited for him to speak, my glance traveled back to the girl; and, when our eyes suddenly met, it seemed to me that there was an appeal in them. But if so, it was at once forgotten, for the lawyer started to speak.

His voice betrayed a certain hesitation, as though he scarcely knew what to say, or just where to commence; and his remarks were addressed directly to Bartley.

"I hope, Mr. Bartley," he said, "You will excuse my asking you to come over. But, when I heard you were visiting Mr. Thayer, I could not resist calling upon you for assistance."

Bartley informed him he would be pleased to aid

him in whatever manner he could. I could see that his statement came as a relief to the lawyer, and from the manner of the girl, also to her. I had noticed one thing about her; although her uncle had been killed only a few hours before, she did not show any signs of grief. Instead, she acted puzzled and, it seemed to me, a little frightened.

"You know," came the voice of the lawyer, "I am in a sense—or rather was—Culver's lawyer." He shrugged his shoulders and corrected himself rather dryly. "That is, I did some business for him, although I hardly knew him, and I saw him only three or four times. But Culver was his niece's guardian, and, having to consult a lawyer once or twice, he came to me." He paused, then added impressively: "And she became of age to-day."

Bartley gave a curious smile, but did not speak; and in a moment the lawyer went on: "To put it briefly, she had an estate of about forty thousand dollars coming to her, but I can find no trace of it. Furthermore, the bank here, where Culver kept his money, tells me that he drew almost everything out before he went away. We managed to get into his safe-deposit box, though it was not strictly legal to do so, but found it was empty."

Waiting a moment, he continued: "I do not, of course, know how much Mr. Culver was worth, but

his niece tells me that forty thousand dollars was the amount of the estate which was to come to her. There was some property in Providence; I telegraphed down there and found it was sold over four months ago. The money was placed in the bank here. Some weeks before he left, Mr. Culver began to draw out his deposits, until, at the time he went away, there were only about five hundred dollars left."

Thayer gave a sudden start. "By Jove," he said, "it looks as though he intended to skip out with it."

The lawyer agreed, but added: "It would have seemed that way but for the fact that he was found dead last night. That looks as if he intended to return. Still, why should he withdraw all his money and sell the girl's property?"

Bartley's cool, low, cultured voice broke in: "You forget one thing. He returned, but what did he do with the money? He would not have forty thousand dollars on him. Besides, I judged his own money must have been considerable."

"I don't know what he was worth," the lawyer replied. "He was presumed to be a wealthy man. The bank tells me he deposited a large amount of money during last summer and in April and May of this year."

Bartley's voice took on an interested tone. "You

say his deposits were during the summer months? Did he deposit much in the winter?"

"I don't know about the winter months," was the reply.

I stole a glance at Bartley and found his face grave, yet there was a gleam in his eyes. Something had pleased him, but what it was I would not be able to discover until he told me. The lawyer lapsed into silence, and in the stillness that followed I heard the girl move uneasily on the divan by my side. I stole a glance at her. She was leaning back against the arm of the divan, but she seemed to be nervous, her face flushing a little under my glance.

"Can you tell me something about your uncle?" Bartley asked, turning to the girl.

Rather eagerly came her reply, the voice a little uneven: "I am afraid I cannot, sir. Though he was my uncle, yet it has only been within the last two years that I have been in his home. I was in school in the South. He never visited me, and he only wrote once or twice. Last summer he invited me to come here, saying he would be away most of the time. In fact I did not come till August, and then I stayed but three weeks, and he was not here any of the time. He left a note, saying he had been called away on business."

"And this visit?" Bartley inquired.

"Why, this time he asked me to come when school ended. He wrote that his brother was coming from England. He himself expected to be away till about the end of the month, but he wrote that he wished me to be here to help entertain his brother."

She paused, then suddenly in a rapid tone added: "In fact, Mr. Bartley, I never really knew my uncle. I saw him only three or four times in all. He was not a man to say much, or to bother much with me."

"How old were you when he became your guardian?"

"I was around eleven. Mother was dying, and she sent for my uncle. I don't know where he lived, but I remember mother said he was a broker. After her death the lawyers told me she had left a will making him my guardian. He placed me in a school right away, and it's only within the last two years he ever asked me to his home. I was so small when mother died, and afterward spent all my time in a school, that in reality I never knew him at all. He always paid the school bills and kept me supplied with money—not a great deal, but all I needed."

"This other uncle, who is coming from England," asked Bartley, "I take it you never knew?"

The girl shook her head slowly. "No, I never

saw him, though I have a vague recollection of being told there was another uncle. I was a little surprised when I got the letter saying that he was to be here this summer, and that I was to entertain him until Mr. Culver returned."

"And when was the other uncle to arrive?" came the question.

"Some time at the end of this week," was the answer. "I think he is on the water now."

Bartley rose to his feet, going over to one of the bookcases and examining the books before him, as though he were very much interested in the titles. After a few moments he turned to the lawyer. "I presume," he said, "you will look into the condition of the estate, and it will take some days?"

The lawyer nodded, adding that the whole affair was so perplexing that he hardly knew what to do. It would take some time to find out just what had happened to the money—if he ever could find out. For the present it seemed that Culver himself was the only one who knew where it had gone, and he was dead—murdered. Clearly the lawyer had not yet reached what seemed to me to be the only conclusion: that the dead man had intended to cheat his niece out of her property. If it were not so, why had he gone away, and why had he withdrawn the

money from the bank? But the hardest thing was to fathom his reason for returning to town if he had intended to steal the money.

Asking if he could take a look at the room, Bartley rather slowly started to examine the books in the cases. There must have been four thousand of them, perhaps even more, for the cases went almost to the ceiling. The books for the most part were old, and, as I rose and glanced at their titles, I judged that they were part of some old library. Bartley spent little time with these, but at the section that was made up of newer books, he turned and asked the girl if her uncle read much. She replied that many of the books had been bought with the house, but he, himself, had purchased those which Bartley was at that moment looking at. In the silence that followed, Bartley took several books from the shelves, glanced at the titles, and placed them back again with a smile.

There was little of interest in the room. The safe filled one corner, and near it stood a phonograph. The only odd thing I saw was a small roulette wheel which stood upon the desk. This, however, was more a toy than anything else. There were few pictures on the walls, and these were mostly cheap prints. The windows came down to the level of the floor, opening on the veranda, with

long, heavy curtains which hid them. In fact the whole room was decidedly commonplace, with little to guide one as to the tastes of the person who had used it.

Bartley's examination of the room ended in front of the safe, before which he paused. Glancing at it a moment, he turned to Slater. "You will have to have this opened," he said.

The lawyer agreed, saying that he would endeavor to do that in the morning, and he also asked Bartley if he would be present when it was done. Saying he would, Bartley returned to the divan and stood looking down at the girl.

"Would you mind telling me," he asked, "just what you are afraid of?"

She gave a little start, and her face reddened. Then, as her eyes met his, she said: "I am a little afraid, Mr. Bartley. It's foolish, I know, but the death of my uncle, coming at this time when I am alone in this big house, makes me slightly nervous. I know it's foolish to be afraid, but——" Here her voice trailed away.

"Yes," came Bartley's voice encouragingly.

"But after last night, when some one tried to break into the house——"

"What!" broke in Bartley and Thayer at the same time. "Some one tried to break in last night?"

Astonished at their surprise, the girl simply said: "Why, I thought you had heard of it."

Bartley quickly told her he had not and asked her to give all the particulars.

"It was about eleven," she said, "when I heard a noise downstairs. It seemed to come from this room. I took a small revolver with me and came to the head of the stairs. Just as I reached them, I saw the figure of a man by the front door. I was pretty well frightened, but called out that I would shoot, and he then ran out of the door."

"You mean the front door was open?" Bartley asked.

She nodded. "Yes, I waited for a while and then roused the housekeeper. She was frightened, but said I must have dreamed it, for she had locked the door before going to bed. I knew that, for I had tried it myself before I went upstairs, and it was locked. But we went down and found that the door was open. I bolted it again."

The expression on Bartley's face was a strange one, and his gaze, leaving the girl's face, swept the room. In a moment he asked: "Did you find anything disturbed?"

"Not that I could see," she replied. "However I don't know just what is in the house; but this morning we found the dog had been killed."

The look of bewilderment on Bartley's face was astonishing—at least to me. As a rule one could not tell by his expression what his thoughts might be. But he was showing astonishment now, and it was in the tone of his voice when he asked: "The dog killed—how?"

The girl gave a shudder, as if she did not care to talk about it, then said slowly: "He was found in the next lot, strangled, a cord drawn tight about his neck."

Eagerly came the question: "Did you hear him bark shortly before you heard the sounds downstairs?"

The girl was silent for a while, trying to think, then said slowly: "I—think, perhaps I did, about thirty minutes before I heard the sound. You see I went to bed about ten, but the strange house and the fact that I'm alone made me nervous, and I lay awake in the dark. I am sure I heard him bark—once."

"Not more than once?"

"No, I am sure of that."

Bartley turned to the lawyer: "Slater, to-morrow if I were you I would get some man from the village to stay here a while. It's hardly safe for the two women, and there should be a man around."

The girl protested that she was not afraid, but at

last admitted that she would feel safer if there were a man in the house. It was agreed that the lawyer should endeavor to find some one who would look after the place and sleep in the house. Though the girl had said it was not necessary, yet she admitted she would feel safer.

In the long talk that followed, a talk that lasted an hour, both Bartley and Slater tried to find out if the girl had any knowledge of her uncle's business, and where he had lived before coming to Chester. Her knowledge of the uncle was slight, since she had seen him only a few times in her life. In fact, till she had been called to identify his body, she had seen him only twice during the last four years. What his business might have been, she had little idea, though she believed he had plenty of money. They questioned her for at least an hour, but in the end knew no more about Culver than when they began. She could give them no information, though she was perfectly willing to tell all she knew.

I could see that she was getting tired. Her face was flushed, and she was leaning wearily in the corner of the divan. It had been a hard day for her—one of strain and anxiety. The lawyer's statement regarding her money must also have been a great shock. Though weary and nervous, she tried to

hide it, answering all the questions that were put to her.

At last Bartley said: "I know you are tired, and I am going to ask just one more question, then I think you had better go to bed to try to get some sleep. Your uncle, I heard, dismissed his housekeeper a few days before he went away. Do you know where she went?"

She shook her head and replied that she did not, but she volunteered the information that the present housekeeper, the fat negress, lived in the village.

After a few more words we rose to leave the room. Bartley, however, went over to the side of the girl and held a low conversation with her. I heard her say "The front room," and then he spoke softly. A look of relief seemed to pass over her face, and she nodded eagerly. Then, rising to her feet, she went to the door with us, and in a moment more we were out into the night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LIGHT AT THE WINDOW

AS we stepped down upon the walk, we discovered that the night had changed. The wind was rising, blowing in little gusts, and it promised rain. The sky was overcast with heavy clouds, clouds that seemed to be hanging very low. Above our heads the branches of the trees were swaying in the wind, with an unpleasant sound. Since we were outside the town limits, there were no electric lights, and the darkness seemed rather intense until my eyes became accustomed to it.

Going a few feet down the walk, Bartley paused and looked back at the house. He studied it for several moments, turning at last to glance across at the dim shadow of Thayer's house, which stood only a short distance away. Then without a word he hurried after us.

The lawyer conversed briefly with Bartley, then said good night and turned toward the town. We walked the few yards that separated us from Thayer's place, then walked into the yard and up the path to his house. No one spoke, and when his

housekeeper opened the door, we went silently into the library. I dropped into a chair, while Bartley stood fingering a book that was on the table, though I knew from his expression that his thoughts were far away. His face was serious and, I thought, puzzled. Thayer excused himself, returning in a few moments with three tall glasses on a tray. As he handed us each one, he said with a little grin: "I thought a pre-Volstead drink would do us no harm."

Bartley laughed and sank into a chair, while Thayer seated himself on the sofa across from him. After a sip of his highball, the writer placed it on the stand by his side, and suddenly asked: "John, what do you make out of all we heard to-night?"

Bartley gave him a grave look and said: "Well, Thayer, you are a writer; you wanted a plot, and here is one."

The tone of Thayer's voice, as he replied, was so serious that it almost made me smile. "Plot!" he said. "Do you know, John, if I had invented a plot like that, placed it in a book, the critics would either have said it was impossible, or that it was old stuff. Think of it—here is Culver murdered. We don't know who he was, what business he was in, or anything about him. He came to this little country place and kept himself away from the people.

Suddenly we find him murdered and discover that he had stolen his niece's inheritance. Some plot, I would say. What do you think?" and he leaned forward earnestly.

Bartley did not answer, and Thayer insisted: "You must have some sort of a theory, John."

Bartley slowly drank the remainder of his highball; then, with a laugh, he said: "Thayer, you certainly have been reading too many detective stories. Now, though I am a criminal investigator, yet I do not perform miracles. I know nothing more about this affair than you do. In fact, there never was a detective I ever heard or read of, a real one, that could solve a crime without clues. There seem to be no clues in this affair"—he paused, then added—"as yet. Theories! I have a dozen, but they mean little so far."

Not satisfied, Thayer turned to me and asked what I thought. I told him very frankly that several things surprised me. The first was what Kelly had said about Culver's owning the house he had been murdered in; next was the fact that he had not seemed to care for his niece. I added, as a third thing, that it was strange that some one had tried to break into his house the night of the murder.

"Funny," Thayer broke in, "they should kill the dog. That shows it was some one who was not

familiar with the house and wanted the dog out of the way."

"Or else," drawled Bartley, "some one who knew the house, knew the dog, and did not wish to be recognized by him."

"How do you make that out?" came Thayer's surprised voice.

"Very simple," was the answer. "You remember the girl said she heard the dog bark—once. She was awake, and if he had barked more than once, she would have heard it. If it had been a stranger, the dog would have kept on barking. But there was one bark, one, perhaps, because he recognized the person. And that is just the reason why the dog was killed."

Suddenly remembering the dog which had been on the veranda of the old house, when I returned with the chief on the night of the murder, I told them about it. I pictured rather vividly the unearthly howls that he was giving and the evident fact that the dog was afraid. Bartley listened, his face grave enough, but he asked no questions, simply saying that it was odd.

Several times he rose and went to the window, peering eagerly into the night. The last time he did this he glanced at his watch when he came back to our side, and then he said: "Thayer, I think

perhaps it might not be so bad if we sat up in my room."

Thayer half protested that the library was the more comfortable place in which to sit, acting somewhat surprised at Bartley's suggestion. As we started to leave the room, Thayer left the lights on, and Bartley went back and turned them out. He had some reason for it, and I gave his friend a glance that said as much.

Our two large bedrooms were in the front of the house. We went into Bartley's and, finding some chairs, made ourselves comfortable. Before he sat down, Bartley drew aside the curtain from the window and looked out again, as he had done downstairs. Coming back to the bed, he seated himself on its edge, and lighted a cigar.

"Do you know," said Thayer slowly, "I kinder think that one of us ought to have stayed over at the house with that girl. I somehow do not like the idea of her being alone, more so after some one tried to get in there last night."

Bartley rose, and turned the button that put out the lights. That left the room in semi-darkness, due to the light that came in from the hall. It was dark, yet not so dark but that I could easily distinguish both Bartley and Thayer, who were across the room from me. As if answering Thayer's

last remark, Bartley's voice floated over from the bed:

"I thought of that, Thayer. You may have noticed that the room the girl sleeps in can be seen from my window. I told her to lock her door to-night, and if she heard anything, to turn her light on and pull her shade halfway down, since I would be watching to see if there were any need of aid."

Thayer's voice had a startled tone in it, as he asked: "But, John, that looks as if you thought some one might try to enter the house again—try it to-night."

"That's what I think," came the reply. "If there is something in that house that they want, then, it seems to me, they want it at once. Last night they were frightened away, but they may try again to-night."

"But," I protested, "why did we not stay there then, so we would be on the spot if some one tried to break in?"

I heard Bartley chuckle. "For a very good reason, Pelt. Don't you see that they would have known if we were in the house, and, if we had stayed, no attempt would have been made to get in? Instead, we come away. They see the lights go out in Thayer's library and in the bedrooms. Naturally then they think we do not expect another

attempt will be made. By staying here we can watch the house, and, if the girl hears anything, she will arrange the window shade."

Thayer half protested: "But at that, John, you don't know that any one will try to get in there."

"I know that," was the reply, "but then in my profession one tries always to outguess the other fellow. The odds are no one will, but, if some one does, there is a chance that we shall know it."

For a while no one spoke. Bartley had risen from the bed and taken a chair over near the window, where, hidden by the curtains, he could watch the other house. I could dimly see the figure of Thayer across from me, and his cigar made a little red spot in the darkness. For a while we sat there silently smoking, and it was Thayer who broke the silence.

"John, what do you think about the girl's saying the door was open, that front door, after she had locked it?"

Bartley's voice came from the window: "It's hard to tell, Thayer. One might think that it was a professional thief. As a rule, when burglars enter a house, they unlock the front door, leaving it slightly open so they can have a clear field to get out, in case they have to move quickly. Then again, the person may have had a key. If that is so, then it

is some one that knows the house very well. The most important thing is, not how they got in, but what they were after."

"It's queer," I remarked, "that on the same night Culver was killed his house should be broken into."

"Yes," came Bartley's voice after a pause, "that is queer. The killing of the dog is queer, also. But I would give a good deal to know just what it was they were after."

"The girl showed nerve," commented Thayer.

We all agreed to this, and then for a while silence fell again, broken by Thayer's again asking Bartley what he thought of the whole thing. I had been wondering myself what Bartley thought, and I waited eagerly for his answer.

Speaking rather carefully, as if choosing his words, he said he hardly knew what to answer. The first thing, the thing that seemed apparent on the face of it, was that Culver had come to town to hide, and that he had some reason for keeping under cover. He added that a small town like this was often considered by people like Culver as being a good place in which to hide. But, with a laugh, he told us there were no safe places, that it was only a matter of time, no matter where a person went, before he would be recognized. To illustrate this he told of several cases where criminals had

gone into the most remote spots, thinking they would be safe, and were recognized by people within a year. The city, and the larger the city the better, was the safest place for a man who wished to drop out of sight.

He said that it seemed as if Culver had intended to go away and, perhaps, never return. His taking the money which belonged to the girl, showed that. His not writing, the withdrawal of his own money from the bank, made it evident that he had no intention of returning.

"But he did come back," Thayer said dryly, "and was murdered."

"Yes," came the reply, "he did return. That is as great a mystery as the fact that we do not know what he did with the money he took with him. A man that does as he did—withdraws all his money from the bank and takes the money that he holds in trust—is evidently making a get-away. But Culver returned secretly, and the question is—why?"

"He returned, all right," I insisted, "and he was seen by two people just before he was killed."

"Two," protested Bartley; "you are wrong, Pelt, by one—that minister."

I remembered that I had not told him of the doctor's statement, that he had seen Culver, called to him, and the man, without speaking, had struck

across the fields. In a few words I told what the doctor had said, and when I finished, Thayer exclaimed:

"But that's absurd, Pelt! Both those men could not have seen him. The doctor was two miles or more west of the town, and the minister was about the same distance the other side of the town. At least five miles separated them. Culver could not have been in both places at the same time. That's logical, isn't it, Bartley?"

There was a troubled tone in Bartley's voice, as he answered: "It's logical enough, Billy. But some one must be mistaken." He turned in my direction. "Did that doctor know Culver?"

"He said he knew him," I replied. "Had been called in to treat him once. He insisted that it was Culver, but admitted he saw his back first, although, when he came opposite him and spoke, he caught a glimpse of his profile. Then the man without saying a word turned his back and struck into the fields."

"He may have been mistaken," put in Thayer. "It was then about dusk."

"That's true," replied Bartley slowly. "But, even so, the doctor knew him, and he ought not to have been mistaken. It is very odd, however; here is the minister saying Culver passed him in an auto-

mobile, and here is the doctor saying that about the same time he saw him five miles away. And in both cases it could not have been very long before he was killed. It's very queer."

After a pause, Thayer said in a musing voice: "And you don't know anything about the man, his personal habits or the like."

"Oh, yes, I do," retorted Bartley.

"You do?" was Thayer's startled retort. "Where did you find them out?"

Bartley chuckled. "I have eyes, Thayer. I know that Culver read a good deal. He was interested in spiritualism. He was superstitious. He liked music, and he smoked. Also I have the idea that he fooled a little in mining stocks."

"Where did you find out all that?" Thayer queried in surprise.

"Well," drawled Bartley, "did you not notice to-night that the bookcases in his library were filled? Most of them were old things and evidently went with the house when he bought it. But there was also a section of late books; most of them had to do with spiritualism; the crudest sort of fakes were there—all of them. Books on magic, superstition—and all of them had been read. It does not take much intuition to see that he was interested in them.

And a man who buys many books of that kind is, to say the least, superstitious."

He paused, lighted a fresh cigar, then went on: "The phonograph seemed to have an unusual number of records. It is evident that he liked music. The number of ash trays in the rooms told that he smoked. As for the curb stocks—well, there were several of the cheap oil journals, the kind filled up with advertisements of fake oil stocks that are sold in Fort Worth, Texas, together with several cheap mining-stock journals. It's true a man may receive all those because he is on what we call the 'sucker list,' the mailing list of some curb house. And the fact that his name appeared on such a list, is an obvious indication that he must have been interested at some time, in such wildcat investments. Also"—he paused a moment—"he was afraid of something."

"Afraid?" I asked.

"Yes, afraid. The windows had new locks on them, very heavy ones. There were twice as many lights in that room as were needed. He wanted plenty of light, for he was evidently afraid of the dark."

"Why should a grown man be afraid of the dark?" asked Thayer.

"You are presumed to know your psychology," was the answer. "The fear of the dark sets the problem to every psychologist as to what is behind the fear; what is the anxiety, neurosis?' As a rule it is the dread of punishment for one's own evil deeds. I will wager that I shall find that Culver had a great many electric lights in his sleeping room and a lock on his door. His spiritualistic ideas even bear that out. The psychologist will tell you that the dread and fear of death is often transformed to the opposite, and that people with such a subconscious fear try to remove it by spiritualism, by attempted association with the dead."

"Conan Doyle ought to hear you," grunted Thayer.

"Maybe he ought to," came the quick reply. "But that's what a psychologist would say about his great credulity. It is a subconscious fear of death, translated in an effort to overcome it by his belief in spiritualism. Anyway, Culver was afraid, and I would like to know what he did to cause the fear—and perhaps we shall never find out."

He rose to look out of the window. As he did so, I heard the clock on the floor below strike twelve. Rising from my chair I went to his side and looked out into the yard. It was dark, yet I could faintly

make out the form of the house across the way. For a moment or two I stared into the darkness, listening to the sound of the wind, as it swept through the branches of the trees. Far away, down in the town, I heard a dog bark, bark for a second—then all was silent.

As Bartley again took his chair, I heard Thayer yawn, and in a sleepy voice he said: "What do you think about Kelly's story of that boy he locked up?"

"It's curious, to say the least. It hardly seems to me that a young college boy would murder a man—a man that we must presume he hardly knew. If he did, we have to assume that he knew Culver would be in the house and knew he had money on him. But it's hardly logical to think he would leave a dance, take his car, go three or four miles, murder a man, then return and dance with his friends."

"It's not logical, but his having the pocketbook and hiding it seems rather singular," I ventured.

"Yes, it does. His having the pocketbook seems odd; but his trying to hide it, is the fool thing a frightened youth would do. Of course Kelly thinks his having it shows that he killed the man. The police, as a rule, never take the simpler and logical

explanation; they always look for something else. In this case, though the boy says he found it, they assume at once he is lying."

"But he refused to say where he went," replied Thayer.

"He did; but maybe a night in jail will make him talk," came the laughing retort.

Conversation died away after this, and I slipped down in my chair. As the minutes passed, I realized that it was going to be a hard matter to keep my eyes open. The window was closed, because Bartley had not cared to have the sound of our voices float out on the night. And it was close, and the cigar smoke made it much worse. I felt sleepy, and my eyes closed for a second, once or twice. I thought that Bartley perhaps was presuming too much in thinking there would be another attempt to enter Culver's house. I could hear Thayer moving uneasily in his chair, and I judged he was getting restless, too. And yet Bartley sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the window.

I had almost fallen asleep, and I was roused by the clock, striking either one or the half hour, when there came a sudden exclamation from Bartley. In a second he called to us, and, as we crowded around him, he said:

"Look!"

I looked eagerly out into the yard, across its length and past the great trees to the other house. It stood black, a mere outline against the darkness. From an upper window there streamed forth a faint light. The curtain was half down, a black mass against the window. But across the lower half there was a ray of light. The girl had turned the light on in her room; across the space of the two yards it was telling us that she had been aroused, that she had heard something, and was appealing to us for aid.

CHAPTER IX

A NIGHT OF SUSPENSE

THE moment during which we stood watching the light at the window seemed endless. My first thought had been one of surprise. I had not believed any one would attempt, for the second night running, to enter the house. Yet, as I stood by Bartley's side, I realized that he was not surprised. Many times in the past he had worked on what we call "hunches," certain intimations from the subconscious mind. And this time he had been right. There across the dark and silent yard the thin streak of light from the girl's window called to us for aid.

Only a moment did we stand there. Then Bartley turned, his voice tense, as he spoke: "Pelt, there is a gun on my bureau. I want you to go around the side of the house and wait. I will try the front door. Thayer can take the other side. If any one comes out, try to get him."

Thayer's voice was cool enough, as he groaned: "Fine, John, but suppose the person don't wish to stop."

"You must try to hold him," was the reply. "But don't use the gun."

Finding the gun, I followed Thayer and Bartley out into the hall and down to the main floor. Here Thayer paused a second to say: "We had better go out the back door, John, then there will be little chance of being seen."

Bartley agreed that this was a wise suggestion, and we went through the kitchen to the door at the back of the house. Opening it, we slid out into the darkness. Against the side of the house we paused to listen, but there came to our ears no unusual sounds. In the distance we heard the sound of a fast-moving automobile, the sound growing fainter and fainter; and somewhere across the fields a dog barked, then became still. The wind, which had risen, was lashing the branches of the trees, but we heard nothing suspicious.

With Bartley in the lead, we went around the house, keeping in the shadow of the trees, as we stole across the lawn to the road. With a glance up and down its length, a glance that revealed that there was nothing in sight, we darted across the road to the shadow of the trees that ran along the high wire fence. The fence was at least ten feet high, and it was not possible to climb over it; we would have to go in through the main entrance. At the

gate Bartley paused again, looking intently into the yard.

The great trees within cast weird shadows and splotches of blackness before us. It was a dark night, but not dense. Out in the road it was possible to distinguish objects several feet away. The trees, however, with their shadows, made the yard very dark. The walk which led to the house, because of its pebbled construction, was a streak of white. On each side was a privet hedge, and, with a whispered warning to be careful, Bartley slipped through the gate and behind the hedge. We followed, pausing to listen again, but in the end heard nothing.

In the shadow of the hedge I doubted if we could have been seen. Still, Bartley took no chances—bending low and keeping within the dark shadow. The hedge swept off in a wide circle before the house, and here we stopped. The house was in front of us, looking very huge in the darkness, but there was not a sign of life about it. All was still, and even the light in the girl's bedroom, two stories above us, had disappeared.

Coming closer to us, Bartley whispered: "I am going up on the piazza and into the house. I want you, Pelt, to creep around the other side and watch. Thayer will stay here. Keep in the shadows."

"But," I whispered back, "how will you get in?"

"I provided for that," was his low reply. "The girl was to leave the window unlocked in the room across from the library. If you hear anything within the house, make a break for it; smash open a window if necessary to get in."

With a low "Good luck," we watched him dart across the driveway. For a second his figure could be seen, then, as he darted up the steps, it was lost to sight in the darkness of the veranda. With a whispered word to Thayer, I left him, creeping slowly until I reached the end of the hedge almost at the back of the house. Here I hesitated, not wishing to leave the protection of the shadow. But in a second I saw that this would not be necessary. There was a great tree almost in front of me, its trunk casting a dark spot before me.

I crept into its cover; then finding, because of the greater number of trees, that it was much darker at the back of the house than at the front, I went on until I came around to the other side. Here in the shadow of a huge bush, a bush that made a cave of darkness, I squatted down on the grass to wait.

For a while I waited, my every nerve at the highest tension. The darkness, the stillness, and the wonder of what might be happening to Bartley, unnerved me somewhat. Then, again, I felt alone.

It seemed as though I were the only person out in the night, and I felt as much alone as if I were on a desert island in the sea. I peered up at the house, its outline a mere mass against the darkness. But nothing could be seen; no light came from within. In the yard itself I could perceive nothing except the varied mass of shadows of all shades of darkness. Above my head the boughs of the trees, swaying with the wind, made weird sounds.

Suddenly I began to feel that I was not alone in the yard. I sensed that some one else was watching the house, some one crouching in the blackness, as I was, some one also waiting. It was a mere impression at first, and I carefully looked all around. But I could see nothing; the night was far too dark. Yet I felt uneasy. Something told me I was not alone, that there was some one, but where, I could not tell. The feeling increased, though I tried to pass it off as due to the darkness and my nerves.

Then suddenly I saw the flash of a match a few feet in front of me. If I had not been looking at the very spot, I should have missed it. But I saw the flare, lasting but a second. In that space of time I saw the outline of an arm, as the man cupped his hands to light a cigarette. Then the flame died out and left only the red spot of a cigarette pointed

low against the ground. There, in front of me, some one hidden in the shadow of another bush had broken the monotony by lighting a cigarette.

I hardly knew what to do. The fact that there was another person in the yard was something I had not expected. He must have felt perfectly safe, with no fear of being observed. His lighting a cigarette showed that. I wondered how it was that he had neither seen nor heard me, as I came round the house. If I had come from the front, he would have seen me, and without doubt I would have run right into him. But I was sure he had no suspicion he was not alone in the yard. His presence troubled me. For a second I wondered if he were the person that had caused the girl to signal to Bartley. I decided that he was not; for, though I watched the black shape by the bush, nothing moved, and I heard no sound.

What to do, was the question. I had a gun, but shooting was not to be thought of. He might even be some member of the police, for all I knew. Yet I doubted this; for the police, so far as I was aware, were not watching the house. I tried to make up my mind what to do. Should I creep up and seize the man? Still, if I did that, and there were some one in the house, it might warn the per-

son whom we were after. I knew that Bartley had not expected any one would be in the yard. It was the house he was interested in.

My eyes strained through the darkness, trying to make out the figure ahead of me. Becoming better accustomed to the shadow, I could just make out, once in a while, the faint outline of the body. Like myself, he was waiting silently—for what? The cigarette must have gone out, for I no longer saw the red tip. After a while I saw the figure disengage itself from the shadow and move toward the front of the house. As it melted into the blackness, I lost sight of it.

I half rose to follow, when suddenly from around the side of the house I heard the sound of feet crunching on the gravel of the walk. Some one was running—running rapidly. I half turned, and at that second there loomed out of the darkness coming from the back of the house the figure of a man. He was half bent over, head down, running as fast as he could, as if some one was after him. All this I observed in the mere flash of a second; the next moment he stumbled against me, as I started to rise. He was going so fast that, as he struck my legs, he fell rolling over and over on the grass.

With a quick leap I was on him, seizing him by his coat, which was the first thing my hand felt.

The force of his fall pulled me over on him, and for several moments we rolled back and forth on the grass. Perhaps he had been more surprised than I had been, for it took him several seconds to realize that some one was trying to hold him. Then, as the fact struck him, he began to struggle to loosen my grasp.

In the darkness it was almost impossible to see where to get a strong hold. My hand fastened on his arm, but he shook it off; I clasped one leg, but a sudden kick in my side forced me to let go. For a few moments we struggled, neither able to get a firm grip. That the man only wished to get away, I understood. Time after time my grip held him, only to be broken. And then it dawned upon me, it was only a question of a moment, before his superior strength would overcome me. One of his hands, slipping over my shoulder, had fastened around my throat, and though I tried to shake it off, I was not able.

Suddenly he rose, shaking off my grip around his waist, and as I struggled to my feet, his fist shot out and took me behind the ear. The blow was a terrific one, though it did not reach me fully, but it stung. The force was great enough to throw me to my knees and in falling, the man managed to break my grip. Taking advantage of the fact that

he was free, he started on a run. The entire struggle had taken place without a word, only the forced breathing of us both had broken the silence.

I rose to my feet, and started after the figure which I could just make out ahead. He had gained about twenty yards, and instead of going to the front of the house, circled around a tree and ran to the back. It struck me he was running as if he was familiar with the grounds. That gave him a better advantage, for though I followed as fast as I could, yet I stumbled again and again and once almost fell over a bush. As I ran, I wondered what had become of Thayer and Bartley. If the man had come around, as it seemed, from the other side of the house, Thayer should have seen him.

My unfamiliarity with the grounds, made it impossible to gain on the man ahead of me. He ran, circling around the bushes and the trees, but always going for the rear of the yard. I followed as fast as I could, having difficulty in keeping him in sight because of the darkness. That he knew I was following, I had no doubt, though as far as I could see he did not turn his head.

At the end of the yard, was a large building used, no doubt, for a garage. In the darker shadow of its side, I lost the man for a second. In fact, when I reached its side I could not tell for a moment

where he had gone. I stopped, and listened, wondering if he had found some hiding place. Then I heard the sound of his running footsteps, breaking through the brush in the next field.

There was no fence back of the building, and I found myself in a field. A field with high grass, and small shrubs, with vines that plucked at my feet, tangling me as I tried to run. Though I no longer could see the man, I knew that he was somewhere in front of me. I could hear the breaking of twigs, the sound he made as he lashed his way through the tangled underbrush. He was still running, and there was no doubt that he knew the ground, a fact that gave him a great advantage.

Losing ground at almost every step, because I had to run slower, I followed across the large field, then over a stone wall into another field. Here I gained a bit on him, for suddenly I saw the outline of his figure ahead of me; saw it but for a moment as he climbed over a second stone wall. But when I got over the wall, once more the figure had vanished. I listened carefully, and thinking I heard him ahead of me, started through the field of high grass. Coming to another wall, I climbed it, and listened again. This time I heard nothing, only the usual sounds of the night.

There seemed little doubt he had managed to

escape, but in what direction was the problem. First I wondered if he had circled me, and headed back to the house. I decided however, that inso-much as he knew the house was watched, he would not be likely to return. No doubt he had gone ahead of me. So, not running this time, I groped my way through the field into another, and then reached a small hill covered with trees. As I lurched against the first one, it dawned on me that I was lost.

I tried to figure out how many fields I had come through, and the direction of the house. It was somewhere back of me, but as I decided this, I realized that, in the darkness, I had turned again and again, and could not be sure in what direction the house lay. It was not very far away, that I knew, but just where puzzled me. Leaning against a small tree, I tried to find a light in some house, that would give me my direction. But there was not a light anywhere in sight. Listening, the only sound that came to my ears was the wind in the trees around me. Above a few stars showed through the thick clouds, and on all sides stretched the darkness. There was no doubt I was lost.

I decided it was no longer any use to endeavor to find the man I had followed. By this time he must be far away. The thing for me to do was to get

back to the house. Slowly I retraced my steps, till I bumped into a stone wall, no doubt the one I had climbed over last. I followed it for some yards, reaching another wall over which I climbed, then crossed the field to still another wall. After fifteen or more minutes, I saw that I had only complicated my problem, for I had climbed enough walls to have reached the house. Instead, I found myself in another field which, when I crossed, ended in still another wall.

A little weary, I leaned against the stones to get my wind. For a while, I tried to peer through the darkness, hoping to catch sight of a light somewhere, the friendly sign of a house. Then, as I saw nothing, I began to be aware of how utterly alone I was. The darkness seemed to stretch away into infinity. There was not a sound, I was alone under the dark clouds in an almost silent world. A little feeling of depression came over me, which I shook off at once. I reassured myself by the thought, that even if I did not find the house, it would not harm me to be out in the fields till morning.

I decided that wandering around aimlessly, as I had been doing was of no avail. The more I walked, the more bewildered I became, and I was scratched and torn by the briars I had encountered. But one thought struck me. The wall on which my

hand rested, was a little higher than the field, and the field itself, was on the sloping side on a hill. Climbing on the wall, to my joy I saw far down below me, a light in the window of a house. There must be a road near there. Getting my bearings, I started in the direction of the house, the ground sloping gently away beneath my feet, and crossed through at least four fields, when I suddenly saw the road before me.

When I reached it, I saw my troubles were not over. It was a road all right, but it was also the intersection of a cross road and instead of one road to follow, there were four directions to choose from—four roads all leading different ways. I searched for a sign post, found it, and striking a match, I saw that the directions had faded out. Going back to the center of the cross roads, I stood a moment thinking. There were four roads before me, and I was sure one ran into the town—but which one of the four?

Suddenly, I heard far back of me, the sound of an automobile. It was coming very fast, and even as I turned in the direction of the sound, I saw its flaming lights as it swept around a bend in the road. Here was aid. It approached rapidly, and the lights became brighter, till where I stood was one mass of light. Wishing them to see me and stop, I

stood in the center of the road, knowing that they could not fail to observe me and would stop. The car was coming at a terrific speed, swaying from side to side. To my surprise, though the lights shone on me, the automobile did not appear to be slackening its speed. As the car swept toward me, I saw that it did not intend to stop, and, what is more, it did not intend to turn out. In a second it would sweep over the place where I was standing. There was no time to pick a place in which to land, and I threw myself out of the way, falling and tumbling down the side of a ditch, till I brought up against the side bank. With a roar the car passed over the spot where I had been standing a second before.

With every bone in my body sore, I picked myself up; limping back to the road I could hardly believe what had taken place. Whoever had been in the car must have seen me; in fact, could not have helped seeing me. I had been in the center of the four roads, bathed in a perfect stream of light. They not only had not stopped, but they had had no intention of stopping. Instead, they had tried to run me down. If I had not jumped, the heavy car would have struck and killed me. And there was no doubt in my mind that whoever was driving the car had deliberately tried to kill me.

My eyes had been blinded by the light, and I had been unable to observe the car in detail. I had not been able to see any one in it, as the car swept by while I was rolling in the ditch. But I knew the direction in which it had gone, and I resolved to go the same way myself, figuring it would bring me to the village.

A trifle shaken by my experience and with an ankle that pained a little, I followed the winding road which was thick with dust, that rose in clouds, as I shuffled through it. I walked slowly and instinctively kept to the side of the road. As I went along, I tried to figure out why the driver of the car had attempted to run over me. It had been a deliberate attempt, and it dawned on me that I must have been recognized, as I stood in the light. That puzzled me, for there was hardly any one in the village that had seen me. Then it flashed over me that I had been well studied, as I sat in the witness chair at the inquest. If those in the car had desired to kill me—and I decided they had—then it must be because they thought I knew something.

I walked, it seemed, about an hour, though it must have been much less, when I saw before me the lights of the village. They were a welcome sight, as they sparkled through the darkness, about a mile away. Then, as I came round a bend in the

road, I found myself before Thayer's house. As I limped up the walk to the door, I saw that the library was a blaze of light. Reaching the veranda, I found the door closed, gave a ring, and in a second Thayer's red face peered forth. He gave a cry of welcome when he saw me, and I hobbled into the library after him.

At my appearance Bartley, with a startled exclamation, came to my side. I must have been a sad-looking object. The blue suit, which had been nicely pressed when I went out, was a mass of wrinkles. It was torn in many places, covered with dust; and, as I went over to a large wall mirror and gazed at myself in the glass, I hardly recognized the figure that was reflected. My face was covered with dirt, my hair was a tangled mass, one eye was half closed, and there was a great bruise by the side of my cheek. My clothes were ruined; the trousers torn in several places, and the breast pocket was gone from the coat. It hardly seemed possible that all the damage had been caused by my rolling in the ditch when I jumped from the path of the automobile.

Bartley studied me with a very surprised look on his face. If I had not been weary, perhaps the sight of Thayer's amazed wonder, as he gazed on me with his mouth wide open, would have made me

laugh. But I did not feel like laughing. I suddenly realized that if there was a spot in my body that did not ache, I did not know where it was.

"What have you been doing, Pelt?" came Bartley's voice.

I wearily sank into a chair, throwing my crushed hat on the table. Then in a tired voice I asked Thayer for something to drink, saying I needed it. He hurried from the room, returning with some Scotch, and after drinking it I felt a shade better.

Rather slowly I told them my story. Bartley listened with an amused air, but Thayer hung on my words, as though they were romance. But when I came to the story of the automobile and what had followed, the amusement faded from Bartley's face. When I finished, Thayer burst forth:

"My Lord, John; they tried to kill him."

Bartley slowly nodded his head, saying there was no doubt of it. Then he turned to me:

"I presume you had no time to see who was in the car—or anything about the car itself?"

I assured him I had no time to observe either the car or who might have been in it. I was sure it was a large car, and the body was of some dark color, but not black. The whole thing had taken place in such a short time, however, I had been un-

able to see any one. In fact, there had been no time to look.

"One thing seems sure," Bartley said slowly: "You must have been recognized by the persons in the car when the light fell upon you. There is no doubt they tried to run over you. If they had, you would have been killed. And that proves another thing."

"What's that?" came Thayer's eager voice.

It proves that they wanted Pelt out of the way. If so, it's because they think he knows something, or has seen something that will connect some one with Culver's murder. But, so far as I know, Pelt has nothing of the sort up his sleeve." He gave me an inquiring look, and I answered that I had told him all I knew.

"But," said Thayer, and in his eagerness his words piled upon one another: "Why, that would mean that Culver's murderer is in the town."

"Not necessarily," Bartley replied. "It *may* mean that; then, again, it looks as though there were something besides the murder that is of importance. Anyway, some one wanted to get Pelt out of the way."

After a pause he suggested that I needed a good night's rest and a bath. But I insisted that I

wanted to hear what he had discovered in the house. He protested that it could wait until morning. Then, seeing that I was eager, he said he would satisfy my curiosity. He waited until Thayer, who had slipped out of the room, returned, which he did in several moments, bringing with him three tall glasses in which the ice tinkled, as he approached. After his drink, Bartley began.

He had gone into the house through the window the girl had left unlocked, finding himself in a dining room that opened into the hall. But—and he half smiled as he said it—he had knocked a chair over, which had made a great racket. He knew that it would warn any one on that floor, and he darted for the door to the hall. The hall was empty, and he was in the library just in time to hear some one running on the veranda. By the time he got outdoors, he could see no one; and, Thayer joining him in a moment, he returned to the house.

I turned to Thayer: “Did you see anything?”

The writer gave a little smile. “Did I? Why, Pelt, I got behind a tree and watched that house, and I saw scores of things—at least it seemed so. I thought I was there hours, and I decided it was better to write adventure stories than to live them. You know”—and he grinned—“the dark night, the villain, the trusty and brave hero—only I did not

feel like a hero, I felt like a fool. Then all at once I saw some one run down the walk to the main gate. I followed behind the hedge, but he had a start on me, a big start. When I reached the gate, there was no one in sight."

"That must have been the man you saw under the bush," came Bartley's suggestion. "The man in the house ran around the side where Thayer had been, while he was at the gate."

Thayer nodded. "That must be it. I only saw the figure of one man, and he was going through the gate. Never saw the other man at all. About a moment later I heard Bartley call my name, and I joined him."

When they entered the house, Bartley called the girl, and she told him what had aroused her. She seemed to have had plenty of pluck, for, instead of staying in her room, she had waited with a revolver. She explained why she had done this, by saying she knew she would have been unable to hear any one in the darkness at the head of the stairs, in her room with the door locked, and she felt perfectly safe with the gun. At last she heard the sound in the hall, went to her room and fixed her window shade and the light, as agreed.

I asked Bartley if he had any idea what the thieves were after, but he shook his head. He did

add, however, that there was something in the library they were after. Then, as he rose, he said that he had called the police, and they had sent a man up to spend the night at the house.

"I gave a twinge, as I rose, for I was sorer than I had thought. Then, while Thayer turned out the lights and locked the door, Bartley and I went up the stairs to our rooms. As we stood by our doors, Thayer joined us. He gave one look at me, then grinned, saying:

"You are a pretty object, Pelt."

Then, as we entered the rooms and said good night, he paused to add—and there was a weary tone in his voice—"John, if this is a sample of what you call a quiet day's work, then not for mine."

CHAPTER X

A MESSAGE IN CIPHER

THE hot bath I took was no doubt the reason why I was so late in getting down to breakfast next morning. In fact, when I reached the dining room neither Bartley nor Thayer was in sight, and the housekeeper informed me that they had finished breakfast several hours before. She told me that she would have breakfast ready in a few moments and would serve it in the sun room. Giving me the paper, she went out into the kitchen, where I could hear her busying herself with the dishes.

I went into the sun room and sank into a chair by the open window. It was another beautiful day, the sun bright, with a breeze from off the distant hills cooling the air. The mountains stood clear against the background of a blue sky, a sky in which only a few fleecy clouds could be seen. In a far-off field a few cattle were standing, half asleep, under the shade of a tree.

For a while I glanced through the window, then turned to the paper. It was only a small, four-page

country sheet, issued every evening. The story of the murder filled almost all the front page, with a rather weirdly written account of the arrest of young Sheldon. But, after I had read the story, there was nothing that I had not known. The boy still persisted in refusing to say why he had left the dance, and where he had gone. He admitted hiding the pocketbook, and his reason was that which Bartley had given—fear. He denied that he even knew Culver and said that he had never seen him.

When the housekeeper brought in the breakfast, I threw the paper to one side. I had almost finished when Thayer came into the room, greeting me with a smile. He sank into a chair, lighted a cigarette, and then asked how I felt. After I had informed him that, save for feeling a little sore in places, I was all right, he told me that Bartley had left a message for me.

I was to go down to the jail to see the young man Kelly had arrested, and, if possible, get him to tell where he had been the night of the murder. Thayer said that Bartley wished me to remember he believed the boy told the truth regarding finding the pocketbook, but there must be a reason why he was afraid to tell where he had been. I half protested to Thayer that, if the youth had refused to tell the police—whom, no doubt, he knew—he would not

tell me. But Thayer replied that Bartley had said that the fact that the boy did not know me might be the very reason why he would answer any questions I asked.

Thayer busied himself with the paper till I had finished breakfast; then, when I rose, he said he would go down to the town with me. I told him I thought I would walk and get the car which I had left in the garage. Telling the housekeeper what time he wished lunch, he joined me a few moments later on the lawn.

It was a shorter walk to the town than I thought, and in a few moments we were standing in front of the rambling courthouse. Opening the door of the police station, the first person whom I saw was Kelly, seated at a desk. He greeted me and in reply to my question said the chief was in his office. Pushing open the door, we entered, Kelly following.

The chief was reading a newspaper, his feet on the chair before him. An old corncob pipe was between his lips, and the air was blue with smoke from the cheap tobacco he was consuming. As we entered, he turned and brought his feet down with a bang upon the floor, greeting me a bit facetiously by quoting: "‘Is this a spirit I see before me?’"

I grinned and assured him it was not; then I asked him if I could see the young man. He was

perfectly agreeable, but said it would be of very little use, since the police had done their best to get the boy to talk. He turned to Thayer.

"Kelly thinks the boy committed the murder. Still"—and he slowly shook his head—"I don't know. Don't seem reasonable a young kid like that would kill a man."

"But where did he get the pocketbook?" broke in Kelly's voice, and I could see from his manner that he and the chief must have argued the question back and forth with little result.

"Darned if I know," was the answer, as the chief rose and hunted through his desk for some keys. Finding them, he motioned for me to follow him. Thayer said he would wait till I returned, and I followed the chief through the door. We walked past a few cells, for there were not many, stopping in front of the last one. Inserting the key in the lock, the chief threw open the door, and, saying I could lock it and bring him the key when I finished, he retraced his steps down the small corridor.

In the cell on the cot was a young man of about nineteen. He looked up eagerly, as I entered, and I could see that he had not taken his plight in a philosophical manner. His hair was uncombed, falling in disorder over his forehead; his eyes were red, as though, during the night, he had been crying.

There was no doubt he was afraid, yet his face was honest, and his eyes, though anxious, met mine bravely.

Seating myself on the cot by his side, I told him who I was and explained about Bartley. To my surprise he had heard of him, having read of some case he had solved. I told him why Bartley had sent me down, explaining, as best I could, the position he was placing himself in by refusing to talk. I did my best to make plain that all we wished to do was to help him, stressing the point that he might have some little fact which in itself would aid us in solving the crime.

When I ended I thought at first he would say nothing. But after a while he raised his head, giving me a searching look. As if reassured by the look I returned, he said suddenly:

"I guess maybe you are right. I don't know anything about the murder, but that detective, Kelly, got me right away by saying I did."

"You should have told him why you left the dance," was my reply.

For a moment the boy was silent, then he said slowly: "I was afraid to."

"Afraid—what of? If you had done nothing, why should you have been afraid?"

All at once as though he had decided to make a

clean breast of it, he turned and asked eagerly: "Will you try to fix it up, if I tell the truth?"

I informed him I would do everything that I could, assuring him that, if he had not done anything, there would be nothing to "fix up," as he put it.

"Well," he said, "I was afraid of my father. You see, at the dance one of my friends called me up and said I could get a bottle of hooch, if I wanted it."

He paused and his face turned red.

"I thought it would be a great joke to say nothing to any one, go out and get it, and when I returned to slip it into the punch."

At my surprised look, he said in a disgusted voice: "A great idea, wasn't it—a big fool idea of a joke? Well, anyway, I slipped out and started my car. I am not going to tell you where I went to get the hooch—you don't want that, do you?"

I told him I thought that end of it could be managed without trouble, provided the party who gave him the hooch would corroborate his story. I felt sure the chief or Kelly would take care of that without making trouble for any one.

He continued: "Well, I had to go up, by the Yard place, that house where the murder was committed. There was a big hill just before you reach

it, and, when I got opposite the house, I thought I saw the flash of a light. That surprised me, for I knew the house was closed. I did not stop, and when I got about three hundred yards past it I got another jolt——”

“You did?” I interrupted.

“Yes, I saw a car parked over in a field. I thought it was a strange place to see a car, but did not stop. Went on a ways, got the hooch, and started back. When I reached the spot where the car had been, I slowed down to get a better look at it. The car was gone.” He paused for a moment, then added: “And it was right there I found the pocketbook.”

“Where was it?” I asked with interest.

“In the grass at the side of the road, right where the tracks of the car were. You see, I slowed down to catch a look at the car, and my lights were turned into the grass. It was there I saw the pocketbook. Naturally I stopped, picked it up and opened it. I saw by the cards inside to whom it belonged. There was a little money and nothing else. Naturally enough, when I passed the house, I looked to see if there was a light, but the place was dark. So I returned to the party.”

He paused again, then went on. “When I got back, I suddenly realized what a fool trick it would

be to put that hooch in the punch—me a guest in the house; so I hid it up under the bed. The next morning they told me of the murder, and I got scared. I had intended, of course, to give the pocketbook to Culver. But when they said he had been found dead in that house, I got scared.”

He gave a little sickly grin, then burst out: “You see, Mr. Pelt, they said no one knew who killed him, and there was I with his pocketbook, and I had been up on that road. I thought no one would believe me, and I knew it would make no difference if they did not know about my finding the thing, so I hid it. You know the rest of the yarn.”

But I ventured: “Why under heavens did you not tell Kelly?”

The boy’s face reddened, but he said: “Two reasons: I was afraid they would think I knew something about the murder; then, again, I would have to tell of going after the booze, and I was afraid of my father.”

“Your father?” came my surprised voice.

He nodded. “Yes, my father. He is one of the officials of the Anti-Saloon League—death on booze. I knew he would about kill me if the story got out, and I was afraid to tell. No matter what I did, tell it or keep still, I was in trouble.”

As he became silent, I rapidly ran the story over

in my mind. It seemed straight enough, and from the boy's manner I believed he was telling the truth. His explanation of why he left the dance was plausible enough, and his desire to place the liquor in the punch was one of those fool tricks that certain young people play, it seemed logical enough, and I did not blame him for being afraid when he heard about the murder. Culver had been murdered, and he had his pocketbook. What was worse, he had been near the house around the time the crime was committed. No wonder a boy, under such circumstances, was afraid. And I grinned at his explanation of his fear of his father.

Rising, I told him I would tell the chief and Kelly what he had told me and endeavor to have them "hush up" the fact of his going after the liquor. He thanked me, and, saying good by, I left him, returning to the chief's office.

The three men were engaged in a conversation when I entered the room, but they turned eagerly, as I closed the door. Dropping into a chair, I repeated what the boy had said. The big face of the chief wore an astonished look, as the story progressed, but Kelly sat puffing on his pipe, his glance never leaving the floor. When I finished, the chief turned to his detective.

"There is a booze joint up that road, Kelly."

The detective nodded, then turned to me: "Two things will prove if the boy told the truth. First, if the man he got the stuff from corroborates him; and secondly, if he can produce the hooch. You said he took it back to the party, but you did not tell us what he did with it."

I replied the boy had told me he placed it under the bed, but that I had no idea where it was now, or what he had done with it. I added that no doubt he could explain about it, if they asked him.

The chief turned to the detective, as though to ask what he thought about the story. For a second their glances met, then Kelly said: "I want to be fair with the boy. His refusing to tell where he had been, and about finding the pocketbook, made me think he knew at least something about the murder. But I don't know now. His story seems honest, and I think it can be checked up. But why did not the young fool tell me the yarn when I first saw him?"

With a grin I replied that he was afraid of his father. By the smile that came over the faces of the two officials, I saw that the father was known to them, and that he must be a bit of a fanatic. Then I told them I had assured the boy they would keep that part of the story from the public in return

for what he had told us concerning the rest of his experience.

The chief nodded to this, saying that, if they could check up the story, he could take care of that part. He laughed, as he told us he knew the father, and that the boy had every reason to feel scared of what the father might say and do.

I rose to go, but at the door I turned to ask if the chief had the pocketbook, and what was in it. He answered by saying that there was about sixty dollars, three cards, and a piece of torn paper with a lot of figures on it. Nothing of any importance, he assured me. Offering to show the contents to me, I said there was nothing of interest, and Thayer and I started for my car, which was in a near-by garage.

When we returned to the house we found Bartley on the veranda, smoking a black cigar and with a book in his hand. He looked very cool in his white flannels, and he greeted us cheerfully. As we seated ourselves, he asked regarding my morning's work.

He said nothing till I finished, though he smiled when I told him the reason the boy had given for leaving the party. When I paused, he simply said: "It's about what I thought, though there are several queer things in the story."

Seeing Thayer's interested glance, he added: "I don't mean the story itself, but the boy's account of seeing a light in the house, and also the finding of the pocketbook. One might even think that whoever killed Culver threw the pocketbook away either in rage, because he did not find what he wanted, or because he had hoped some one would find it and get into the mess the young man got into."

Turning to me, he asked what had been in the pocketbook. I told him it contained nothing of importance—three cards and some money. Then I remembered the torn piece of paper with figures on it. At the last, Bartley became interested and asked me if I had seen it. I shook my head, and with a little curious look on his face he picked up his book.

After lunch Bartley remarked he would take the car and run down into the village. He had spent the morning in Culver's house with the lawyer. Nothing had been found which would throw any light on where Culver had gone when he left town, or on the reason the house had been broken into during the night. The girl's affairs were in a bad state, and there seemed to be hardly anything left. But he made no explanation, nor did he say very much, for that matter. Then, saying he hoped I would have a restful afternoon, he went around the house for his car.

I spent the afternoon in a porch swing, with a book—a book of high romance, adventure, a beautiful heroine and a brave hero. The plot was exciting and held me. As I read, I could hear the sound of Thayer's typewriter coming through the open windows behind me, and I wondered if he were at work on a book.

Under the spell of the yarn I was reading, the afternoon drifted away to oblivion, and it was almost five before Thayer, his writing over for the day, joined me. As he sank into a chair, he picked up the book which I had thrown aside and glanced at the title. Then, leaning back in his chair, he lighted a cigar and we started to talk.

Thayer was evidently more interested in the murder of his neighbor than I had thought. He told me it had always struck him as strange that Culver should have shown so strongly that he did not care to associate with the people of the town. He, himself, had only seen him a few times and had spoken to him once. He played a bit with the idea that perhaps Culver had some reason in going into seclusion, but did not try even to guess what it might be. He did say, with a smile, that the affair was more mysterious than any of the detective stories he had read.

This set him off on another strain. He expressed

his wonder that Bartley, with all his education and culture, his wide knowledge of books and psychology, should have chosen the profession of a criminal investigator. He asked me if I knew that Bartley was perhaps the best critic we had on French literature of the eighteenth century, and if I understood just how deep was his knowledge of the literature of Europe? I replied I had a slight suspicion as to that, and with a shake of his head he expressed his wonder that a man with that knowledge should spend his time in solving crimes.

At that moment we heard the sound of Bartley's machine coming into the drive, and, as we looked, he stopped, after making a wide circle before the house. With a wave of his hand, he descended from his car and joined us on the veranda. After he had seated himself, Thayer said in a languid voice:

"Well, mighty sleuth, did you find anything this afternoon?"

Bartley laughed at his tone. I could tell from his manner that he was pleased over something, and I waited to discover what it might be. He turned to Thayer. "Billy, did you ever notice any cars stopping in front of Culver's late at night?"

The writer shook his head. "No, don't think so; but, you know, I could hardly see them from my bedroom if they did. By 'late' I presume you mean

around one or two in the morning. No chance for me to see them at that hour because I am one of those people that like their sleep."

He paused, gave a start, and then said slowly: "Come to think of it, John, though I never saw any, I have been wakened three or four times by the sound of a car starting down in the road there. I remember now I used to wonder where the cars were, and why they stopped here. This is a pretty quiet town, and there is very little of the late-party stuff here."

Bartley's next communication was along a different line. After lighting his pipe he said: "It's a queer thing—what we think takes place, and what actually does happen. Now you, Thayer, and others, tell me that Culver never saw any one, no one ever came to his house; that there is nothing any one knows about him. But, as I said, a country town is a bad place for a man to try to hide what he is doing. Strangers are naturally looked over carefully; even the windows have eyes. I had an idea that all Kelly had to do was sit still and wait for people to come in and tell what they knew about Culver. They have started to do so."

"What did he hear?" came Thayer's earnest voice.

"Well, one farmer, who takes milk down to the

station every night, returning about one o'clock, or a little later, in the morning, walked into the police station, and informed the officers that on four or five occasions when he passed the Culver place on his return to his farm, there was a car parked before the house."

"It must have been the car I heard," replied Thayer.

Bartley nodded. "Yes, and your hearing the sound of the engine, as it went away, bears out the farmer's story." He paused and went on: "Then a while ago—the man is not sure of the date—another farmer saw a car, with a Canadian license on it, parked in front of the house where Culver was murdered. This farmer came in and told that fact to Kelly late this afternoon."

Bartley paused again, but since Thayer and myself said nothing, he continued: "So you see that though Culver, as you say, saw no one, yet somebody did go in to see him—and very late at night at that. The lonely house, deserted and boarded up, that no one ever went to, as Kelly put it, did have some one interested in it, and also late at night, when most people were abed. That's not all."

He gave a grin at the eagerness with which we both asked what else he had found. Lighting his pipe, which had gone out, he said: "I went into the

bank this afternoon. They very kindly showed me the statement of Culver's account. He had a good deal of money there from the time he came, and at various times he made large deposits. They were put in almost up to the time he went away. Suddenly he began to draw the money out, until the day before he went away he had but three hundred and seventy-four dollars in the bank. And"—he paused a moment, then added gravely—"his deposits were all made in the late spring and summer months, not in winter."

Puzzled, as though not understanding what he was driving at, Thayer asked: "What do you mean by that, John?"

"Simply this: It seems significant to me that, when the spring came, after the roads were good, Culver should every few weeks add large deposits to his account in the bank. This ran through the last summer, into the early fall, then stopped, starting again the last of April and running through to the time he went away. Now, it seems to me, in this may be found the reason for Culver's coming here. It may even be the answer to what he did."

His friend's face was a study, and, as he said nothing, I asked: "Do you think he was running booze?"

Bartley slowly shook his head. "I can't tell,

Pelt," was the reply. "But the fact that he never deposited this money till after the roads had dried up, and when they became impassable he made no more deposits, makes me think he was engaged in something illegal. It may not have been booze; that takes a good deal of space. It may have been _____"

He left the sentence unfinished, and I inquired: "What?"

Instead of answering, he pulled from his pocket an envelope. "Here is something else. Pelt said that in the pocketbook the boy found was a piece of paper with figures on it. He did not think it worth even looking at, but here is a copy of it. It was tucked away behind the lining of the pocketbook.

He pulled from an envelope a piece of paper and without a word handed it to me. Thayer bent over to look. It was a copy, Bartley said, of the paper found in the pocketbook. But, as I looked at it, my bewilderment increased. Apparently it was nothing but a crazy mass of figures, without meaning or purpose. And the paper was not all there, one-third of it had been torn away. As I looked, it seemed almost absurd to attach the importance to it that Bartley seemed to. One needed only to look at his face to see that he thought it was impor-

tant. With a look at his face, I glanced back at the paper:

The Psyc.

$$\frac{+3}{25} = 26.34.29.4$$

$$\frac{+4}{24} = 11.10.21.22$$

(50)

$$\frac{-2}{35} = 29.22.4.17.5.15.22.$$

$$\frac{(1000)}{.} + \frac{1}{24} = 0.4 \quad (7)$$

$$\frac{16}{16} = 5.6.7.20.30.$$

$$\frac{15}{15} = 25.15.0.31.20.21.35.35$$

For a while I studied it, becoming more and more bewildered. Finally Thayer raised his eyes from the paper in my hand and exploded: "What the devil do you think it means?"

Bartley's voice was grave, as he replied: "That I cannot say as yet. It's a cipher of some kind—a very clever one. I thought I knew most of them, but this is different from any I ever saw. But I think——"

"Yes," I broke in on him, "what?"

"I think, perhaps, we have the explanation of the attempts to break into Culver's house. That message is incomplete. I have the idea that somewhere in his house is the missing portion of it—that the attempts to enter the house were attempts to find the other part."

CHAPTER XI

BARTLEY DISCUSSES THE CRIME

TO my surprise Thayer started to laugh, and, as I turned in amazement to look at him, he said: "John, maybe you are right, but it strikes me funny. Here I was telling you I wanted a detective story, but all the plots were old. Now comes this crime, and, as you go on, out pops the oldest thing of all—a secret message in a code. It made me laugh to think that if I put it in a story, some one would say 'old stuff,' and here it pops up in this case."

He reached out his hand for the paper and studied it for a while, turning it from side to side. His brow knit, as he gazed at it, but in the end, slowly shaking his head, he handed it back without a word. Bartley took it from him and replaced it in his billfold.

"You know," he said, "this code is not so simple a thing as I thought. I know most of the ciphers that have been used, but this is different. The figures, of course, are used in the place of letters. You noticed you have for each word three sets of

figures, with sometimes a plus sign, then again a minus, or both, and some even have none. Now, they tell us that the letter 'e' is the one we use most often, then comes 'a,' and 'o,' or 'i'. But 'e' is so often the letter that comes in almost every word, that, if one can pick it out, you may be able to figure the rest. But in this thing the code seems to change with every word. It will take time to decipher."

Thayer gave a sigh. "This affair gets more and more mysterious."

"Oh, no," said Bartley quickly. "We know a great deal more than we did yesterday."

"We do," drawled his friend. "I must say I am glad to hear it. I was under the impression we knew nothing except that the man was killed."

Laughing at his tone, Bartley informed him that we did know more. To start with, Culver had not been the man of seclusion that people thought. The automobiles parked outside his house late at night, together with the fact that he had retired to the country town, all suggested that he had a reason for being in seclusion. This seclusion was not so great, however, but that some people saw him secretly after the village was asleep. The manner in which his deposits were made in the bank, the fact that they were made in the summer only, told

that he was receiving large sums of money—perhaps from some undertaking which was not legal. Bartley assured us that there was no doubt Culver had intended to disappear silently. But right here came another mysterious thing.

Bartley said he was unable to understand why the man had returned. All evidence pointed to the fact that, having withdrawn all his money from the bank, he never intended to return. But he had returned, and the question was: Why? What had caused him to return? What message had he received that brought him back only to meet some one in the old house he had bought, and in the meeting find his death? Where he had been in the weeks after he left the town, was still another mystery.

"It does not strike me," said Thayer, "that you know such a whale of a lot. You have not the slightest idea who killed him."

"No," came the cheerful reply, "not the slightest. But you see the thing I want to discover first is the motive for the crime. The police, as a rule, go seeking some one to place the crime on. I try to find out why a person was killed, what was the reason. Then it's not so hard to find some one who had a motive for the murder. In this affair there is no motive in sight—as yet. It's like a dense fog, but it's starting to lift."

"Do you think," I asked, "he was running booze?"

"That's the second time you have asked the same question, Pelt," came his reply. "I don't think he was doing that. It might look so on the surface, due to the fact he never deposited checks of any size until after the roads were open. However, the main hooch trail from Canada is through New York, not through Vermont. Again, this is hardly the place for a man to have his headquarters if he were running booze. He might have been mixed up in it, but I think it was something else. What I want to do is to get the rest of that paper—the missing part."

"Small chance of that," grunted Thayer—"small chance to find about two inches of a scrap of paper."

"You think so?" smiled Bartley. "I know where it is."

"You do?" came the surprised question.

"I have a pretty good idea," was the cool reply. "That missing bit of paper perhaps caused the attempts to break into Culver's house. Find it, decipher the message, and you get the motive of the crime. Get the motive, and it may not be so hard to find the murderer."

"Very simple indeed," was Thayer's comment. "But I don't see it at all."

"Oh!" responded Bartley. "There is even more in it than that. Culver must have received the message before he left town, or else he returned to the house secretly, while you thought he was away, to get it. Either he was in possession of it before he went away, or else he returned. If it's the first, as I think, it proves that whatever it was, it could wait, something that he could take his time about. Then suddenly something went wrong; he no longer could afford to wait. He returned and was killed."

The housekeeper came to the door at this point and announced that the evening dinner was ready. We rose to our feet, I in the lead. Not till dinner was over did any of us break the silence; and it was Thayer who then asked: "John, is it to-day or to-morrow that the brother is presumed to arrive from abroad?"

Bartley informed him that it was the next day and went on to say that the girl did not know the steamer by which he was coming. There had been only the information he was coming and the time. Thayer suggested that it would be a shock to him to hear of his brother's death, and Bartley agreed; but added that, so far as he could find out, the two brothers had not seen each other for some years. Conversation died away again, and after a while Bartley took from his pocket the piece of paper with

the figures, and began to study it. I could see that it puzzled him; and, though he made some calculations on another piece of paper, yet the result did not satisfy him. Suddenly he turned to me.

"Pelt, where do you think the other part of this paper will be found?"

I thought a moment, suggesting that it must be in the house, adding that on first thought I would have said in the safe. But inasmuch as the safe had been opened, and it was not there, I did not know. Bartley said nothing in reply, studying the mass of figures before him. Then he gave a laugh. "I have been wondering just why this code started off with letters. You see the first thing on it is, 'The Psyc.' Now, it dawns on me that perhaps that was added afterward, and was not on the original message, as received. It's all done with a pen except that. Let us guess that Culver wrote the letters himself with a typewriter, simply as a hint where the other part might be. If so, that's the clew. And I wonder—— A sudden keen look came over his face, and rising to his feet, he said: "Let us go over to Culver's house for a few moments."

Thayer excused himself on the ground of having some work to do, but I went out with Bartley, wondering as to the cause of his desire to visit the house in which he already had spent part of his

day. The walk across the yards was a silent one, and after a moment's wait the colored housekeeper opened the door, taking us, at Bartley's suggestion, into the library.

Without a word Bartley walked to one of the bookcases which lined all sides. Most of the books were old, evidently part of an ancient library. They were of little value—old sermons—historical books of a day long past, the countless mass of rubbish one finds in a house where never a book is thrown away. But one section was filled with newer books; one could tell that by the bright covers. These latter were novels for the most part, save for a section of works upon spiritualism and magic. It was before these that Bartley finally paused, turning to me. "You know, Pelt," he said, "I have an idea that Culver, or whoever placed the message here, put it in a book. That would be a good place to hide it. With several thousand books to look among, it would be safe. I think the typewritten letters are the beginning of a title."

With that he bent forward to examine the books before him, the four rows of works dealing with spiritualism. His eyes ran rapidly over the covers, but it was not until he had almost reached the last row that he took a book from the shelf. For a second he stood looking at the title, and then with-

out a word he held it out for me to see. There, running across the green cover, were the words "The Psychological Phenomena of Spiritualism." He opened the book and with a little smile pulled forth a piece of paper. It needed but a glance to see that he had found the missing part of the message.

The girl came in at this point, and for a while she and Bartley carried on a rather listless conversation. She seemed very tired, though I noticed that she no longer appeared to be afraid. Perhaps the fact that a policeman was staying in the house until her uncle arrived had reassured her. After a few questions regarding this uncle that she had never seen, and whom she knew nothing of, we said good night and went back to Thayer's.

Thayer had left word that he had gone down to the village, and so we seated ourselves in chairs on the veranda. The night was cool, with a slight breeze, and the moonlight playing through the trees cast dancing shadows upon the lawn. Once in a while an automobile would rush past on the road before the house; but save for these, there were hardly any sounds. For a while we sat there smoking and resting, and a feeling of contentment stole over me. Bartley was stretched far back in his chair, the smoke of his cigar floating away on the

light breeze. It must have been fully thirty minutes before he said: "Oh, by the way, Pelt, to-morrow you will have to drive down to Troy to see Culver's former housekeeper. She is down there with her son. I got her address from the postmaster. I want you to find out if she saw any of the people who came in late at night to see Culver."

"You think she will know anything?" I asked.

"Not very much. The postmaster tells me she was a bit hard of hearing, and her eyesight could have been better. But she might have seen or noticed something. I want to know if any of the people of the village visited him."

I turned at the earnest tone of his voice and asked: "You think some one in the town is mixed up in this?"

"Perhaps so," was the answer. "That attempt to run over you last night makes me think some one in the town had a reason for wishing to get rid of you. What it could be, I cannot for the life of me see. But the chief says that every one at the inquest was from the town. This place is a bit off the regular route, only a few strangers or tourists ever get in here. Hardly any one saw you the night the chief locked you up, but there were a good many at the inquest who saw you. When the light from

the car played over you, as you stood in the road, you were recognized."

"But," I protested, "I thought there were two persons in the car."

"Maybe there were," came the reply. "That only makes it worse. Some one recognized you and tried to get you out of the way. And the only reason would be something connected with this case."

Since he did not continue, I ventured to ask him if he had found any reason for the killing of Culver. He turned in his chair to give me a look, but the darkness hid his face.

"Well, Pelt," he drawled, "there is an old expression that the newspapers harp on about 'seeking the woman.' I don't think there is any woman in this case, but there is another thing at the bottom of most crimes of this kind. Since you are not so familiar with the Bible as you might be, I will tell you it is found there. It begins: 'The love of money.' Most murders are prompted by the passion of love or the passion for money. In this case I am sure it's the last. Culver was mixed up in something, and I wonder if he tried to double cross his confederates, and they killed him. I think it is something like that."

"You said," I ventured, "that you did not think it was booze. How about dope?"

"Good for you, Pelt," came his quick answer. "If it's one of the two, it's the latter. In either case it means that to get it down here and to distribute it, involved more than one person. Anyway, it looks as if we may be able to find the motive after a while."

Thayer's voice suddenly hailed us from the walk, and he dropped into the vacant chair by our side, with the information that the chief had checked up the boy's story and found it was correct in its details. They had found the whiskey where he said he had hid it—under the bed. The man who sold it to him had admitted doing so, after a promise that he would not be prosecuted. The boy had told the truth, and the chief had released him.

After a little conversation regarding the absurd prank the youth had played, Thayer and Bartley started a long conversation regarding Andrea Nerciat, telling me for my information that he was a French writer of before the Revolution. Back and forth flew their comments, and after a while I ceased to listen; French literature of that period was Bartley's hobby; as for myself, I knew nothing about it.

The argument ran on until almost midnight, and

I was a rather tired individual when we went to our rooms. After I had disrobed and stood rather idly in my doorway, watching Bartley, he turned to ask: "Pelt, in that library of Culver's did you notice anything odd?"

I shook my head, saying with a yawn, as I turned back to my bedroom: "The only thing that struck me as queer was that small roulette wheel he had on the stand."

CHAPTER XII

A NEW TWIST TO THE CASE

THE sun had hardly risen when I drove the runabout out of the yard. Bartley had suggested that I start early in order that no one in the village should see me. It was his idea that, if no one had noticed me when I went down to see the chief, and no one saw me now, I might later be asked if I had been injured. Inasmuch as we had not told of the attempt to run me down, it would be rather significant if any one were to ask me about it. He admitted it was a long chance, but one worth taking.

It was only about sixty miles to Troy, but the road was not the best one I have seen. It ran through the small valleys, and the hills were long and steep. Because there had not been much rain, it was very dusty, and the sudden curves made it impossible to make any speed. Still, I enjoyed the ride, for the hills were green and restful. A little stream ran along the side of the road for some miles, and, as the water danced rapidly over the rocks, I won-

dered if there were fish in it. Only here and there did I see a house, and the farms were few. In fact, it was not until I was but a few miles from Troy that the country became thickly settled.

Troy turned out to be a rather unimpressive city. The streets were narrow and in horrible condition. Its business section was broken almost every square by torn-down buildings, or by stores in which there had been a fire, and whose fronts were boarded up. There was a general air of neglect about it that was not dispelled by the long brick rows of rather gloomy factories. In its layout it was a queer place. Two long streets, which ran parallel with the river, comprised the business section, while back of them was a great hill on which the houses were spread out.

It was halfway up this hill that I found the little red-brick house I was seeking. The bell was answered by a small boy, whose very dirty face peeked out of the half-open door. It took me some time to make him understand whom I wished to see, but at last he answered that his grandmother was in. Closing the door, he left me standing on the step until he carried my message within. In a moment, however, the door was opened by a young woman, evidently the boy's mother, who asked me to come in. The small front parlor, into which I was ushered, was warm and crowded with cheap furni-

ture. Taking a chair, I waited for the woman I wished to see.

When she entered, I saw at once that she was an older person than I had expected. Her age must have been well over sixty, and the way she peered forward to look at me showed that her sight was not the best. Yet it was a kindly face, crowned with snow-white hair, and the ease with which she moved about showed that she was not feeble. But with the first words I spoke, I saw I would have trouble; for she was very hard of hearing. The wonder why Culver should have had a housekeeper who was so hard of hearing, and whose sight was bad, came into my mind.

After I made her understand what I wanted, and where I was from, I discovered that she did not know that her former employer was dead. She expressed her surprise with several long speeches, though I noticed that she did not show any regret. In answer to my questions—questions that I was forced to put several times before she understood—I finally managed to get from her the information I had come for.

It seemed she had answered an advertisement for a housekeeper, that she had seen in *The Troy Times*, about fifteen months before. Culver himself had come to Troy to see her and had given her the

position. She cooked the meals and kept the house in order. But she could give me very little information regarding her employer. She saw very little of him; her two infirmities had prevented that. She said he did not go out much, except to drive about the country in his car. But he had never given her a ride, and he had very little to say to her. There were days when she did not see him except at his meals.

In response to my question as to whether she had seen or heard of any one's visiting Culver at night, to my surprise she said she had. There had been several nights, after she had gone to bed, when she had been aroused by the sound of a car before the house. Once she had got out of bed and gone out into the hall and looked down the long stairs. I asked her if she had seen anyone and if she recognized who it was. She said: "Yes." I waited eagerly for the rest of her answer.

With the loud voice most deaf people have, she said simply: "It was the young doctor who was with him."

I gave a start. The doctor had told me that he hardly knew Culver, though he had been called in once to treat him. Yet the housekeeper was saying that one night she had seen the doctor at the house. After I had got all the particulars from her, there

seemed to be a doubt in my mind that he was there as a physician. The doctor must have known Culver, yet he had told me he did not.

The rest of her information was of little value. Culver had told her he was going away for some time, and would not need her any longer. So the day before he left, she had come back to her son's. She had no idea where Culver was going, and she did not ask him. I saw she was a bit curious as to why I should ask all the questions I did, but I did not gratify her, and, thanking her, I went out.

After I climbed into the car I sat for a moment, thinking. I had come fifty miles to discover the fact that the doctor knew Culver and had been one of the persons who saw him late at night. Why the doctor had said he did not know the man, I could not understand, but he had said so. That one fact was the only thing I had discovered. I doubted if the trip had been worth while.

As I drove back rather slowly, I tried to figure out what the housekeeper had told me, wondering if there were some reason in Culver's having had a woman that was both hard of hearing and with poor sight. Then I puzzled over her statement regarding the doctor. It had been suggested that Culver might have been engaged in running dope. If so, was the doctor mixed up in it? I had liked the young man,

the night he came to the jail to see me. Still, I knew that did not mean anything.

Some time around five I drove into the yard. I left the car in the garage and went into the house. There was no one on the veranda, but I found Bartley in the library, poring over a book. A small table covered with a mass of papers—papers that bore long lines of figures—showed that he had been busy. He greeted me and, as I seated myself, asked what luck I had had.

I told him I had found out very little, keeping the housekeeper's story regarding the doctor and Culver till the last. When I finished, he played with his pencil for a moment or so, then said slowly: "So it seems the doctor did not tell you the truth. Why he should deny knowing Culver would be an interesting thing to discover—and we will look into the matter."

Seeing my glance at the papers on the table, he waved his hand toward them. "I have been trying," he said, "to unravel that code we found. There is no doubt it is simply one in which figures take the place of letters. I have discovered that the code changes with each word. But upon what combination it is based I must confess I do not know."

He paused, then added: "By the way, Culver's brother arrived to-day from England."

"How did he take the news of the murder?" came my question.

"Rather quietly. Said he was a bit surprised, but told me he had not seen his brother for years, and that made a difference."

"Told you?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes, I went over to meet him. He is about the same build as Culver, except he does not have those big ears, and his nose is straight; not so much hair on his head, either, almost bald, but there is a resemblance. He told me he had lived in England, but he had knocked around the world a good deal in the last few years."

"Did he know where his brother had been the last six weeks?" I ventured.

He shook his head. "No; he had a letter a few weeks ago mailed from New York, saying he would be unable to meet him at the boat, but giving directions how to get here. He spent a few days in New York."

"How about the business Culver was in; did he know that?" was my insistent question.

"He knew nothing about his brother, nothing at all."

With that he turned to one of his long yellow-covered French books, and I realized the conversation was over. I went to my room and took a bath;

when I was dressed, dinner was announced. At the table Thayer joked a bit about the case, saying that only a writer of fiction would be able to solve it, and then Bartley and he began to talk about books. Dinner was almost over when the 'phone rang, and Thayer excused himself to answer it, returning in a moment to say the call was for Bartley. With a look of surprise on his face, Bartley went into the hall, and we heard the murmured tones of a long conversation.

There was a curious look on his face when he again dropped into his seat, and he turned to me to say: "Well, I have an idea we are going to hear something."

Since no one spoke, he continued: "The call was from George Carter." He turned to me. "You know Carter, Pelt."

Because Thayer did not know the name, Bartley explained that the man was in the government service, and his work was mostly with the department of justice. Carter had 'phoned that he wished to have a talk with Bartley and would be at the house in a few moments. Thayer remarked: "Looks as if you might find out something." To which Bartley simply nodded.

Supper over, we were seated on the veranda, smoking, when Carter came up the walk. In his white

silk suit he looked anything but a government operator. His face was tanned, and the little black mustache he wore gave him a slightly affected look. But I knew there were few who were his equal in courage, and his keen, analytic mind was one of the shrewdest in the department. He grinned at Bartley and myself, told Thayer he had read his books, and accepted a cigar and a chair. While he slowly lighted the long cigar, we waited for him to speak. He blew several smoke rings with an air of an expert and then turned to Bartley.

"Well, John, they tell me you are in on this Culver affair."

Bartley laughed, as he replied that he could hardly help being interested in the case, after his assistant had discovered the crime and had been practically accused of committing it. Carter's eyes opened a bit at this, and Bartley explained my evening in the jail. The three men laughed at my expression and at Carter's remark that I should have been in jail before. But Bartley admitted he was interested in the case.

"I suppose," came Carter's slow drawl, "you know who Culver was?"

Bartley shook his head, replying that he did not. He said his face seemed familiar when he viewed

the body, but he had been unable to remember where he had seen him."

Carter bent forward in his chair, removing the cigar from his lips, as he said: "You remember the curb-stock house, Kellof & Kellof, the biggest bucket-shop raid the government ever made?"

Bartley brought his hand suddenly down on his knee. "That's it! I remember seeing Culver in court. He was the man back of the firm."

"That's it," Carter nodded. He was the whole firm. The government closed them up, and Culver got a year or so in prison; he managed to escape most of it by some pull he had. I don't suppose his curb-house ever bought a single share of stock, it was an out-and-out swindle. There's no doubt Culver was the man behind it. After he came out of prison, he opened another bucket shop, but it did not last long. Then he promoted some fake oil stocks and went West to escape trouble. About three years ago he came back to New York and got into another game."

He paused to relight the cigar that had gone out; then, seeing the impatient look upon Thayer's face, went on: "There is no doubt he was mixed up in the dope ring along Forty-second Street. We never got anything on him, but he was in it, I am pretty

sure. But all at once something else happened."

"What?" I asked.

"Well," came the reply, "Culver left the city, and we did not know where he was for a long time." He turned to Bartley to add: "Of course, John, you know I found all this out afterward."

Bartley nodded that he understood, and Carter went on: "Over a year ago the cocaine coming in began to arrive from another direction. There is always a certain amount coming in from Germany on the ships, but we keep that pretty well controlled. In the last year or so we found that a great quantity was coming from Canada through Vermont."

Bartley gave me a smile, and I remembered his remark that if Culver were engaged in anything of the kind, it would be drugs. He said as much to Carter, who nodded, replying:

"Of course we did not connect Culver with all this for some time. And, to be honest, our case is a bit circumstantial at that. But we got men at work, who traced the shipments from Montreal down to this village, then to New York, and in Chester we found Culver."

It dawned on me that Carter must have far more proof than he was giving us. He was telling the story as if it were a connected thing, with all the details filled in. Yet I knew that to do this there

must be far more than we had heard. And it was with much interest that I waited for his next words.

"I won't give away all our case," he smiled; and I judged it was because of Thayer that he was not telling us all the facts. "But we worked it up very well. I even had a man in with the crowd at the Montreal end. He did not find out as much as we wished, for they were a bit suspicious of him. We got enough, however, to know where the stuff was coming from, and we found that it came through this town. In fact, Chester was the place where the cars they brought it down in stopped. From here it was sent into New York."

He paused to light a cigarette and, as he threw aside the match, went on: "But some weeks ago something went wrong."

"Wrong?" I asked.

"Yes, Pelt, wrong. There came down the biggest shipment of all. We know it started; we know it never reached New York; but we are pretty sure it got here. After that all trace of it was lost. It was the shipment we had been waiting for. We had evidence enough to arrest a lot of little fellows, runners in New York who sold it on the street, the men who ran the cars, and such little fellows. But we were not after them. We wanted to make

one good haul, just as the stuff was being delivered in New York or up here. And we failed."

"How was that?" came Bartley's cool voice.

There was a disgusted look on Carter's face. "I don't really know. Everything seemed to go wrong. The big car left Montreal all right; it got over the border; it even, I think, reached here. But on the return trip the car was smashed and the driver was killed."

"Murdered?" came the quick question.

Carter slowly shook his head. "Of that I am not sure, yet it looked so. The car was smashed near the border, and the driver was pretty well cut up. We had been following the car some miles behind and got to the accident about fifteen minutes after it took place. There had been some obstruction in the road, which made me think the smash-up was not accidental. But the driver was dead, and he was the big man of the Canadian end of the deal—a Frenchman named Jean Fort."

"There must have been at least three principals in the thing," said Bartley. "One in Canada, one in New York, and you think the third was here."

"Yes," came the reply, "that's what I think. For that matter, I know there were two, anyway. One was in Montreal, and he is dead; Culver I

am pretty sure was in on it, and he is dead. The New York end we are still working on.”

“You say,” came Bartley’s question, “the last shipment never got beyond Chester?”

Carter was silent a moment. “That’s what I am not sure of. We know that other shipments came here, then were shot through to the city. We know the last shipment, the largest of all, vanished somewhere in Vermont, and that it never reached the city at all.”

“Why did you not seize the car when the stuff was in it?” asked Thayer’s interested voice.

“Because of one thing—we were pretty sure of getting it, anyway, in the end. What we wanted to do was to make the ‘grab’ when we could get the whole crowd dead to rights. We might have taken the car and the driver any time during the ride down from the border, still, we would have had but one man. The Montreal end we were in a position to smash at any time. But the New York end was different. All we had were the runners down there, and we wanted the big fellows.”

Silence fell for a while, as Carter lighted a fresh cigar and waited for some one to speak. I ran over his story and still wondered just what evidence he had against Culver. As if reading my thoughts, he suddenly turned to me.

"I suppose you wonder, Pelt," he said, "what evidence I had that Culver was mixed up in this. It is all circumstantial. He was in that sort of thing before he came up here. The man who was killed when his car smashed up, had Culver's address in his notebook and a road map with Culver's house marked. Then again, once or twice, we know that the cars from Montreal stopped at Culver's house, then returned to Canada. Culver was a brainier man than the others mixed up in the deal, and I am pretty sure he was the big man behind it all. If he had not suddenly gone away, I think we would have had him in a few weeks. You don't find a man like Culver leaving the city for a small town like this unless he is up to something."

Bartley agreed and then told him of the bank deposits Culver had made, and how they were all made in the summer and spring, never after the roads from the border became impassable. Then he asked Carter if he had any idea as to why Culver should be murdered.

Carter shook his head in answer, saying that the biggest mystery to him was the man's sudden death. It was his opinion that Culver was the only person that knew anything about where the cocaine might be, and, now with him dead, its hiding place

was lost. He told us there was little doubt that Culver and the man who had brought it down from Montreal had intended to clean up on that last trip. Now both of them were dead, and the drug had vanished.

I saw Bartley give a little smile at this, and shortly afterward, as Carter rose to go, Bartley walked out on the lawn with him, where the two men held a long conversation. Several times Carter's head nodded in agreement, and at last I heard him say "Yes," and with that he went away.

When Bartley returned, Thayer said with a laugh: "More and more, John, it gets beyond the wildest dream of a writer of fiction."

Bartley nodded. "Yes, I presume it seems so. Still I think one part of your mystery is to be cleared up. Carter tells me it was the day that the papers carried the news of the death of the man who was killed in the auto that Culver left town."

He paused, then added: "That, of course, opens up several interesting things. If there were only two people who knew about the dope and one had been killed, that left Culver in possession of about fifty thousand dollars' worth of cocaine. Others know it was shipped; he alone knew where it was. The question comes, was he killed because of this? The fact that he was drawing all his

money from the bank and had sold the girl's property, shows he intended to go away. The time was drawing near when he had to make a return to the girl regarding his trusteeship. He could not do that, and as it looks to me, he was going to skip. He owed the girl about sixty thousand dollars, I find. His own bank balance was around twenty, and that left him forty thousand in the hole. This cocaine would have saved him, if he had been able to sell it. But he was killed, and I wish I knew why."

"Do you think," I asked, "any one in the village was in league with him?"

I had the doctor in mind, and I knew Bartley would read my thought. He slowly shook his head. "I doubt if it's what you mean, Pelt. It may be, but Culver would hardly take any one into anything he had to share. His reputation, when he ran that fake curb house, was that of a man who took everything for himself."

"Well," broke in Thayer, "if we only could find where they hid that dope you speak about."

Bartley's voice came back, cool and dry. "Oh, that is easy. It must be somewhere in that old house where he was murdered. But we won't go back and look for it right away."

CHAPTER XIII

I SEE CULVER'S BROTHER

I HAD expected that the story Carter told us would have caused Bartley to have become very active during the next few days. Instead, save for several telegrams that he sent to New York, he did nothing for almost a week. Our daily habit was to play golf, going about twenty miles in the car to reach the links. Bartley did most things well, and he loved golf above all other sports, though his game was a weird and wonderful thing to see. At times it was perfect, and his putting was uncanny in its sureness. The next day he would take a hundred to do the course that a few hours before he had done in forty.

Several times during the week I thought over what Carter had told us. There had been a hint that Culver might have been killed by some one of the group engaged in running the dope, but, as I thought of this, I remembered he was pretty sure that only Culver and the man who had been killed in the machine knew where the drug was. But others must have known that an attempt was being

made to bring it down to New York. I wondered a little why Bartley did not endeavor to find the cocaine which he claimed must be hidden somewhere in the old house. It seemed the logical thing to do; yet, so far as I could tell, neither he nor Carter was making any effort in that direction, and there must be some good reason. Carter, I had not seen since the night he came to Thayer's, but I got the idea that some of his men were in town.

The third day after Carter's visit, Kelly came to see us again. He looked even more gloomy than was his wont, and he frankly admitted that he was utterly baffled by the case. But, before he got through talking, we discovered he had gone back to his theory that the boy who found the pocketbook knew something about the crime. He contended that although the youth might have told the truth in everything else, the story of finding the pocketbook seemed incredible. He wanted to know why the person who threw it away did so—something no one could tell him.

Even Bartley's assertion that the boy had told the truth did not seem to remove the doubt which had returned into Kelly's mind. As he put it, the boy was the only person we had been able to connect at all with the crime. He might have told

the truth, and he agreed that his story had been all checked up, with one exception—the finding of the pocketbook. We told him that, naturally enough, this could not be checked up. Despite Bartley's explanation that psychologically the boy's actions were correct, Kelly was still doubtful. The boy was the only person who had been questioned regarding the murder, and Kelly was still suspicious.

Though I had not seen Culver's brother, Robert, yet Bartley had talked with him several times. One evening, as we sat on the veranda, there came floating from the open windows of the other house the voice of a man singing. It was a good voice, and we listened for almost thirty minutes. We found out later that it was the brother, and also that he was a good singer. But we did not hear him sing again; for some reason, that was the first as well as the last time that he unknowingly entertained us.

Meanwhile I wondered a little regarding the doctor's knowledge of the murdered man. I made a few quiet inquiries in the town, discovering that the doctor had treated Culver as a patient. But he told me that himself, and I concluded this must have been the occasion on which the housekeeper had seen him talking with Culver in his library. There seemed no reason to doubt the doctor's

statement that he hardly knew the man. And then one day toward the end of the week there came something that caused all my doubts to return.

I had spent the afternoon in walking through the fields and the woods. About four o'clock I decided to return to the house, and I struck a little path that ran through the trees. Finding a brook running in the direction I was going, I left the path to walk along the cleared bank of the stream. I had not gone many yards before I heard the murmur of voices ahead of me. The brook turned to the right at this place, and when I reached the turn I came suddenly upon two men engaged in a very animated conversation.

For some reason they did not see me, and, as I saw in a quick glance that one was the doctor, I drew back from sight. Curious as to who the other man might be, I left the side of the brook and crept silently among the trees. High bushes screened me from where the men were talking, and I crept up behind them. The bushes ended about thirty feet from the water, and a cleared space stretched between me and the men, who were seated on the bank of the brook. One was the doctor, but the other man I had never seen. Yet something told me it was Culver's brother.

He was dressed in a loud-checked suit which

looked very uncomfortable for the warm day. His face was turned toward me, and there was something of Culver's look about him—a trace of it, but that was all. The long ears that Culver had were missing. Culver's nose had been noticeable for its decided crook, but this man's nose was straight. He had a small black mustache, was partly bald, and slightly thinner than the murdered man. Still, there was a family resemblance, though it was slight.

I could not catch what they were talking about, though the conversation was earnest. Once or twice the doctor disagreed with what was being said, and I saw that his hand rested familiarly on that of his companion. The two men acted friendly enough, and, what surprised me most of all, they did not seem strangers. No one in town had ever seen Culver's brother, he had been out of the country, we were told, for many years. I wondered how the doctor had become acquainted with him, yet here they were talking with the ease and surety of people who had become good friends.

What the conversation was about, as I have said, I could not hear, for only once in a while did I catch a word; then it was only a hint of a word, really, the rest being slurred away by the breeze. Still I bent in the bushes, watching them for a

long while, until at last, convinced that I could hear nothing, and that they were in no hurry to leave, I decided to go away. I crept back to the trees; then, sure I would not be seen, I straightened up and set out for the house. Just as I reached the road, in a little clearing I saw two cars parked, one of which I recognized as belonging to the doctor. The meeting of the two men evidently had not been by chance, but had been prearranged.

I was still wondering when I reached the house, and, as soon as I could see Bartley, I told him about it. He listened gravely enough and then simply said that no doubt the two men had become acquainted. But that did not satisfy me; and, with a twinkle in his eye, he asked me if I wished to suggest that there was anything wrong in the meeting. I told him I was not suggesting that there was, yet it seemed a bit queer to me. But he replied that the world was made up of queer things, and he went back to his book.

That night I saw Culver again. Bartley and I had walked down to the town for the New York papers. We were on our way back when I saw a car approaching. It was going at a terrific speed, lurching from side to side, and, before it reached us, I came to the conclusion that the driver must be intoxicated. We went out of the road to give

him plenty of space to pass. Just before he reached us, we saw Culver's brother in another car, coming from the other direction. He was doing a foolish thing; driving very slowly in the middle of the road and reading a paper while steering with one hand.

There was no doubt he did not see the approaching car, and it seemed that nothing could prevent a terrible accident. We gave a loud cry, and he looked up. At the same second he saw the other car almost upon him. With a quick turn of the wheel he pulled out on the right, and the other car plunged by, missing him by inches only. My face had turned white, for it seemed as if the two cars would be smashed. But the quickness with which Culver had turned out prevented it, and it was with a sigh of relief that I watched him continue up the road. I turned to Bartley:

"A man has to act quickly on an occasion of that kind," I said.

"Yes," came his reply, "he has to act from instinct; there is no time to think."

Then suddenly I saw him give a start. For a moment he stood gravely looking at the tire tracks of the two cars; then without a word he went into the road to look at them. By his side I looked at the marks of the tires in the dusty road. The two

cars had just escaped collision by about two inches. Only Culver's quick turn had prevented an accident, and the marks of his tires in the dust showed where he had turned out. Bartley studied the tire marks for several minutes; then without a word he started back to the house.

When we reached it and went into the library, we saw that Thayer had a visitor. Seated in a big chair, drinking lemonade from a tall glass, sat the minister who had testified at the inquest. Though it was a warm day, he was dressed in a long black coat, and, as I acknowledged the introduction, I wondered what absurd custom caused a minister to wear such a garb. He told us, in that professional tone which so many ministers affect, how pleased he was to see us. And it was a soft, flabby hand that shook ours.

I glanced at Thayer, wondering why the clergyman had called, for Thayer hardly ever went to church, and then only to the Unitarian. The writer gave me a solemn wink when the minister wasn't looking, and we listened to a long account of how difficult he found his church work. Then suddenly he told us the object of his visit. His church, it seemed, was to hold on the following Monday evening what he termed a "strawberry festival," and he had called to invite us to attend.

I smiled at the thought of Bartley attending such a thing, and I tried to picture him eating strawberries in a church. But the minister went on to say that there was also to be an entertainment, and he proffered the information that, as he put it, "the present Mr. Culver was to sing." He informed us solemnly that this Culver was a much better type of man than his brother; that he attended church and had offered to sing for them. All of which, I am afraid, did not interest me very much. But the next moment, to my surprise, Bartley informed him that he would be pleased to accept the invitation, and a few moments later the clergyman left us.

When he was out of hearing, Thayer started to have a little fun with Bartley over his desire to attend church socials. Bartley bore his sarcasm with good grace and informed us that he would insist upon our both going with him. Then the next moment he said he would have to go to New York that night and would be away several days. This surprised us both, for no later than lunchtime he had said that he was thankful he did not have to be in the city these warm days; and I was pretty sure that a few hours before he had had no intention of going to the city that night. Something had caused the change in his plans, though what

it was, of course, I could not tell. We both told him he was foolish, but he insisted that it was necessary. We made no effort to discover why he was going. There would have been no use to do that. Bartley rarely told any one his reasons for doing things.

He took the seven o'clock train that night, and for the next two days Thayer and I simply loafed around. Thayer, it is true, did a little writing, but I spent the time in a hammock reading and sleeping. A telegram arrived the second day of Bartley's absence, asking me to meet him on the arrival of the eight o'clock train.

When the train pulled in, thirty minutes late, as was its custom, Bartley was almost the first person off. He greeted me with a happy smile and handed me several large, square packages to be placed in the car. They were rather heavy, and I wondered what they were. On the ride back to the house he asked what I had been doing while he was away, but he gave no information as to the reason he had gone to the city. He was in a happy mood, and evidently all had gone well.

At dinner, he informed us that he had succeeded in getting more information regarding Culver. Not only had the man been the backer of the notor-

ious bucket shop, but for some unknown reason he had managed to escape a long prison term. After he got out, he was the hidden backer of another curb house, but he was driven from that position by the managers of the Curb. Moreover, Bartley said, there was no doubt that Culver had been mixed up in the illicit sale of drugs in New York. The police had the narcotic squad after him, but, though they managed to frighten him from the city, they did not get any real evidence on him. Bartley added that he doubted if the man had been frightened from the city, as the police supposed, but thought he left because he had some greater game in view.

It was Thayer who asked Bartley if he thought Culver had been killed by some member of the group engaged in running the drugs into the city. To this Bartley replied it was hard to say. It might be, and probably it was the thing back of it. The real mystery of that end of the affair, however, lay in the doubt that any of them, save the man killed in his machine, knew where the drugs had been hidden. If that were so, it seemed incredible to think that any one would be likely to know just when Culver intended to return. The one thing that complicated all of Bartley's theories was the

discovery that, months before, Culver had been making his plans to leave town. The reason for that step Bartley could not fathom.

Two days went by with nothing of importance taking place. Bartley did have a young man visit him, with whom he held a long conversation in the corner of the veranda. He did not introduce him to me, nor, for that matter, did he say anything about him. We spent the afternoons playing golf and the evenings reading. So far as the murder was concerned, it seemed to be forgotten; and, since Bartley never mentioned it, I wondered if he were dropping the case.

Late in the afternoon of the third day of his return, Bartley informed us that it was the night of the strawberry festival, and when six o'clock came he bore us off with him in his car, despite our outspoken protests. All the way to the town we complained violently of how foolish it was to attend such a thing. But to all our complaints Bartley made no reply, simply grinning at us.

It was not yet dark, but when we reached the church lawn we found it decorated with many colored lanterns, all with their candles lighted. Tables were spread on the grass, and women hurried through crowds of children to serve those at

the tables. Everybody was talking, and the hum of the conversation came to us, as we stopped the car before the church. Thayer gave a loud groan, as he gazed at the church lawn, and, as we climbed out of the car, solemnly shook his head at me.

The minister spied us and was at our side in a moment, telling how glad he was that we had come. His red, fat face was flushed by the heat, and his black suit looked hot and uncomfortable. Thayer was captured by him at once and introduced to scores of people as "the famous writer." When at last he managed to get away, he came over to the table that we had found and dropped into a chair.

As we lingered over ice cream and strawberries, I could not but ask myself why Bartley had ever come to such a place. The church lawn was filled, the crowd spilling over into the church itself. The younger people had taken the half of the lawn nearest to us for their sole use. Young men trying to appear far more important than they were, girls who laughed loudly at every remark of their escorts, and, above all, the shrieks of children, as they ran among the crowded tables, were on every side of us. The stray dog seen at all public gatherings got in every one's way, as he went around looking for friendship. In the midst of it all was the

minister, stopping to talk with this group, patting some young man on the back, next smiling and saying a word to some pretty girl.

Our table received many glances, but I soon discovered that it was Thayer who was the object of attention. The minister, no doubt, had spread Thayer's fame as a writer. Some, with a great deal of curiosity, looked at me, and I knew they were thinking of my appearance on the witness stand.

Bartley, to my surprise, seemed to be getting a great deal of pleasure out of the evening. He complimented the very pretty young girl who served us, winning her heart when he paid with a five-dollar bill and refused to accept the change. His glance went all over the scene, and there was no doubt he would have been able to describe all whom he saw.

As it drew nearer to eight o'clock, the hour when the concert was to begin, the crowd grew larger. Farmers began to arrive from the country, and the rows of cars outside the iron fence increased. Just as we were about to go into the church, I saw the doctor drive up in his car, and I pointed him out to Bartley.

The concert was like most church concerts held in country towns. Those who took part were will-

ing enough, but their good will was better than their performance. There was the woman who recited, rendering her selections in an affected tone that was impossible, but which drew loud applause. The usual children forgot their lines, in a sudden attack of stage fright, and stammered them out in voices so low that no one heard what they said. And then at the very end of the concert the minister announced that Robert Culver, who had just arrived from England, would sing for them.

From somewhere near the back of the church the man came through the crowded chairs to the platform. The first glance told me it was the same man I had seen talking in the woods with the doctor several days before. As he faced us, again I saw the faint resemblance to his brother, but there it ended. He gave one glance over the room, then, after his accompanist started, began to sing. His first song convinced me that he could sing. His voice was not only well trained, but remarkably clear in tone. When he ended, the applause was so great that he was forced to sing again; in fact he sang three selections before he left the platform.

The concert over, we went out of the church, through the yard, to the car. As we climbed in, I remarked what a good voice Culver had; both

Bartley and Thayer agreed, though Bartley's reply was given very absent-mindedly. Since it was still early, Bartley drove down to the town and stopped in front of the police station.

We found the chief in his back room, alone. He greeted us heartily, asked one or two questions as to what Bartley had discovered in the past few days, and offered us cigars, which we all had sense enough to refuse. Then for some time he talked about the murder, telling us that he had come to the conclusion it would never be solved. From what he said I could see that he knew nothing about Carter's presence in the village, or of the smuggling of drugs that had been going on.

We had been there about forty-five minutes, when the telephone in the corner rang. Rather slowly the chief raised his heavy figure from the chair and ambled over to the phone. In a bored way he lifted the receiver from the hook, and said "Hello." Then suddenly his voice changed; there came a tone of horror and of the greatest amazement. The curious tone caused us to look at him. The red had faded from his face, and his eyes seemed almost ready to drop from his head. We heard him say, "My Lord! Yes." Then he slowly placed the receiver on the hook and turned to us.

For a moment he said nothing, staring at us in a

hopeless manner. Then he stammered out:
"There has been another murder."

"What?" came Bartley's quick voice. "Where?"

Again silence for a moment. Then the slow voice of the chief spoke again:

"Yes—they just told me that the minister—Sparrow—was found murdered in his church."

CHAPTER XIV

ANOTHER MURDER

THE unexpected had come often in our cases —Bartley's and mine—though I doubt if ever I had heard anything that so startled and shocked me. Hardly believing my ears, I watched the chief stumble over to a chair. His heavy figure seemed to slump before my eyes as he dropped into it, and the gaze he turned on Bartley was one of mingled horror and doubt. Bartley's first glance had been that of a man who could not believe what he had heard; but, after one look at the chief, another expression came over his face. There seemed no doubt that the news was true. The minister had been murdered—a thing which seemed incredible, for it was past belief that any one would wish to kill that simple soul.

I could see Thayer's face, white and horror-stricken, as Bartley asked: "Where did they find him?"

"Just found him in his study at the church," came the reply from the chief in a voice that was broken and trembling.

For a while Bartley stood silent in the center of the room; then, without a word, started for the door. Reaching it, he turned. "We must get up there at once," he said.

By crowding we all managed to get into the car, and in the dash for the church no attention was paid to the speed law. As the car stopped before the white building, we saw that the yard was filled with an agitated crowd. People were gathered in groups, talking excitedly—people who turned, as we stopped. Recognizing the chief, the men rushed to his side, and all started to talk at once. Bartley, however, did not pause, but swept through the crowd to the church.

Entering the vestry we found a number of men and women. Their faces turned, as we entered, and I could see that some of the women had been weeping, while the faces of the men were filled with dismay. They watched us, as we hurried across the room to the closed door at the other end. It needed but a glance to tell it was the door to the study; the look of dread which the people cast there indicated that, and also what was behind it. That closed door had become a symbol of all that was terrifying.

Bartley waited before it till the chief had reached our side, a wait that seemed an eternity. Then,

with all eyes on him, he slowly turned the knob, and we slipped within the room.

It was only a small room, with several chairs, a table and a few cheap bookcases containing, maybe, a hundred books. Upon the walls were several pictures, and the calm gaze of the Christ looked down over it all. A plain, cheap room, with even an air of poverty about it, but a room suddenly made dignified by an object lying close to the open window. There, with the white curtain of the window blowing across his still face—looking far more dignified in death than it had ever looked in life—lay the motionless figure of the minister.

I had never actually liked the man; there had been something in his manner of showing his belief in his own importance that irritated while it amused me. But, as I looked at the quiet figure before us, my mind became filled with a great pity. He had been sincere; his work had lain in his attempt to make the world a better place to live in; and now he was dead—murdered. It was the last phase that I could not understand. There seemed no reason to have killed him, nothing that any one could have gained through his murder. Only a while before he had been rushing from person to person, interested in the petty details of a church social. Now, perhaps, he was engaged in deeper things.

Silently Bartley dropped on his knees and examined the body; presently he pointed to his back. There, under the shoulders, the black coat was stained by a streak of blood. Like Culver, the minister had been stabbed between the shoulders. But there was no weapon—not the slightest sign of a weapon—in the room, nor could we find one.

Rising, Bartley's gaze traveled around the room. There was little use to expect any aid from the chief. The sight of the murdered man had broken him to pieces. He dropped into a chair, his hands trembling, and he looked sick. Not only was it the crime that unnerved him, but, from the few words he said, I understood that the minister was the head of the church he attended.

The door from the vestry suddenly opened, and a young man came rushing in, followed by the doctor. Both men were very excited, but, with a glance at Bartley, the doctor rushed to the window and bent over the dead man. His examination was hasty, but naturally it did not require much time. As he rose to his feet, he said simply that the minister had died within a minute after he was struck.

"Who found him?" came Bartley's question.

The young man spoke up: "I did, sir. After the concert a man came from the phonograph company, and he wished to make records of those who

sung. He used the study in which to do it. Mr. Culver was the last person who entered, and the minister went into the room with him."

"Mr. Culver, the man from the phonograph company, and the minister were all three in the room while the record was being made?" came Bartley's inquiry.

"Yes; then the phonograph man came out, and the minister and Mr. Culver must have talked for a moment, for they did not come out at that time. But presently they came out together, and Mr. Culver went away in his car. I saw the minister, a few moments later, go back to the study."

He paused, his face growing white. "About ten minutes afterward I was standing by the door, and I thought I heard something fall in the study. I opened the door and then——"

"Yes?"

"There was the minister by the window. I rushed in, and he opened his eyes and gasped: 'Not—who—I thought. It's——' But he did not say anything else; he was dead."

"There was no one in the room?"

"No, sir, no one; and I did not see any one."

Bartley turned to the chief. "Chief," he explained, "Whoever killed the minister wasn't in the room at all."

"What?" came the astonished voice of the chief.

"No; the minister was standing by the window, and the murderer, standing outside, stabbed him. You can see that the knife even went through the white curtain. It was all over in a moment."

The doctor had informed us that the blow killed him almost instantly. The young man must have been in the room within a second after he was stabbed, and he missed a good chance to see the murderer. Even then I was puzzled. It was true the window opened on the back of the church, and the yard was dark. But the front yard had been filled with people, and it seemed almost impossible that any one could have been around the back window without being seen. And the reason for the killing was the most puzzling thing of all.

After a moment, Bartley went to the window and looked out into the night. Silently he crawled through and spent some time looking at the ground under the sill. Then he called to me. I joined him outside, and he said, sweeping his hand in a gesture:

"Pelt, this is far more puzzling than Culver's death. I wondered for a moment how the murderer could reach that window without being seen, but that stone wall is the answer."

I could make out a stone wall within three feet

of the window—a wall that enclosed the church property. Though it was dark, yet it was not so dark that I could not see it. The wall ran down the road, and it would have been very possible for a man to have crept up behind it without being seen by those in the front yard. Still, the examination that Bartley made seemed to reveal nothing, and he called the chief to our side after a while.

The chief had recovered his composure a little, and he was told it would be necessary for him to have every person who was around the church at the time of the murder questioned as to what he or she had seen. It might be that some one had seen something or somebody. This work, Bartley said, he would leave to the chief. With that he motioned to us to follow, and we went around the churchyard to the car.

The yard was now packed with people, for the news of the minister's death had spread. Not only was the yard crowded, but people were arriving every moment. They watched us with interest, but no one came up and spoke. Climbing into the car, in a moment we were on the road, headed in the direction of Thayer's house.

It was Thayer who broke the silence, his voice trembling: "John, the sight of that minister has unnerved me not a little. Why should they try to

murder him! I admit he was no highbrow, but he was a simple, kindly soul, and now he is murdered."

For a while there came no reply, then Bartley said: "Why he was killed is simple enough to understand. They wished to shut his mouth."

"Shut his mouth?" was Thayer's surprised question.

"Yes, shut his mouth. I have little idea what he knew, or what he had seen; but he knew something—something that was so damaging to some one that that some one killed him to shut him up. His last words may have meant that he was mistaken in his first notion as to who stabbed him; or they may——"

"What?" I asked, since he did not finish the sentence.

But he made no reply. In fact he had just turned into the drive that led to Culver's house. Surprised at this, we asked him why he was going there. He replied that inasmuch as Culver seemed to have been the last person with the minister, he wished to question him. To Thayer's reminder that the minister had walked down the vestry with Culver, and then the man had driven away, Bartley returned no answer.

As we walked up to the piazza, I noticed that the library was a blaze of lights, which caused

Thayer to comment that Culver slept at night with his lights on. If Bartley heard this last remark, he gave no sign, going at once to the door and pressing the button of the bell. The housekeeper opened the door and, at Bartley's request to see Culver, took us into the library. There was no one there.

Bartley gave a glance around the room, going at once to one of the bookcases, where he seemed to examine its contents. Nothing had been changed since we had last been there, though there were a few more books on the desk. The toy roulette wheel had been removed from a stand in the corner and now stood on the desk. I saw Bartley look at this, and then a most curious expression came over his face. He seemed on the point of speaking when a voice from the door asked: "You wished to see me?"

We turned, as Culver came into the room. As he stood by the fireplace, I noticed that his face was not a pleasant one; there was a hint of cruelty in the lines about the mouth, and I did not like the expression of his eyes. The look he gave us was one of inquiry, one which also hinted that he was not overjoyed to see us.

It was Bartley's cool voice that answered: "Yes, Mr. Culver, I came over to tell you that the min-

ister of the church where you sang to-night has just been murdered."

A doubting look, which gave way to one of surprise, came over the man's face. "Murdered?" he asked. "But why should you wish to see me?"

"Simply because you were the last person who was with him."

The man started to make some angry protest which Bartley stopped by saying: "I know, of course, you left before he was killed. But I wonder if you noticed anything about him—I mean, of fear or excitement in his manner?"

The man slowly shook his head. "I can't say that I did. In fact the last words he had to say to me were regarding coming around to-morrow. I judge my brother treated him rather shabbily, and I thought it would do no harm to show a little interest in him. There was a man from a phonograph shop, who wished to make several records of those who sang at the concert. He was to sell them for the church. I was the last one that sang—the minister was in the room when I did so. But I can't see why he should have been killed."

Outwardly the man was pleasant enough, yet for some reason I could tell he did not care for our presence. After a few more words we said good night and started for the door, Culver with us.

As we reached it, Bartley gave an exclamation, saying he had forgotten his hat, and he went back, returning in a moment. Then came a short good night, and we were out in the open air.

As the car turned into the garage, Thayer laughed. "That chap was not very pleased to see us. He seemed a bit more pleasant than his brother, but that's about all."

When we went into the house we heard the telephone in the library ringing loudly. Thayer answered it, then called Bartley, and we listened to his short conversation. When it was over he came to our side.

"Well, here is something more for you," he said. It seems the minister called the police station just before he was killed and asked for the chief. His desk man forgot to tell him of the call."

"That's queer," came my response.

"Yes," was the reply; "it is. The minister had something he wished to tell the chief. Now, since the chief was at that concert, then it follows that the minister wished to tell him something he had discovered after the chief left. I wish I knew what it was."

Thayer started to speak, but Bartley broke in on his first word to ask if he had a Hoyle in his library. Rather astonished at the request, the

writer nodded and, going over to a book-case returned with the book. Bartley quickly fingered it; then, apparently seeing what he wanted, went over to the desk and drew from his pocket an envelope.

Though I saw he took from the envelope the piece of paper containing the mass of figures, yet I did not ask him what he was doing. He busied himself with a large sheet of paper, glancing every second at a page in Hoyle and putting some kind of figures down on the paper before him. Several times he shook his head, as if in disgust, then went back to Hoyle. Why he should be using a book of rules—one that contained directions for playing games—I could not tell. Thayer watched him for some time; then he wandered out into his kitchen, returning with three tall glasses that looked inviting. He placed Bartley's glass by his side. It went untouched for nearly thirty minutes. Then all at once Bartley raised his head, leaned back in his chair, and turned to us with a happy glance.

There was a quizzical tone in his voice, as he said: "Well, Pelt, you told me the other night where to find the solution of that message, but I did not believe it."

Puzzled, I shot back; "I never did—I don't know how to decipher it."

"But you did just the same," he insisted. "You

said the roulette wheel was the strangest thing in Culver's library; and it's the roulette wheel that deciphered the message for me. The message itself is not very startling."

Wondering, Thayer and I bent over the table and gazed at the mass of figures which were spread out on the sheet of paper. But even then they did not contain anything of value to us. As we looked, Bartley pointed to the open pages of Hoyle.

"It's all there," was his remark.

"For the love of Mike, tell us what you mean, John," came Thayer's impatient voice.

Bartley picked up the paper that had been found in Culver's pocketbook and smoothed it out so we could see it. Then, as we glanced at it, he said:

"You remember, I said this code contained a message of some kind. There are many kinds of codes and ciphers. All are based on the same principle. I knew, of course, that the figures in this represented letters, and if we could only get the combination of figures we would be able to read the code. But that was not easy. I found there was no doubt the figures represented letters. I discovered also that the code was changed with each combination of figures. In other words, there was a code for each word."

He paused and, glancing at the open book in

front of him, continued: "Though I tried all the simple codes, none of them would fit. You remember, I said the letter 'e' was the most common letter. I tried to pick it out; thought I had succeeded, then ran into something else."

"What was that?" was the interruption from Thayer.

"Simply that the figures did not come in the regular order. If, for example, we say that 'ten' was used for the letter 'e,' then 'eleven' should represent 'f.' Only it did not. This code was built upon some defined group of figures, but the figures came in no regular order. It was Pelt who gave me the clue as to where they might be found—though I must admit I did not know it, when he first suggested what it might be."

"I did?" I asked in wonder. "What did I say?"

"You said the thing that struck you strange about Culver's library was the small roulette wheel on the stand. It did seem the odd thing in the room. And the code is based upon that roulette wheel."

"The devil it is!" came from Thayer.

"Yes, it's based on that. We do not have a roulette wheel here, but the layout is in Hoyle. Now look here."

He pointed to the sheet of paper before him covered with the mass of figures. "Here is the first word: 'Plus $3/25$ equals 26, 34.28. 4.' The first thing there, the plus three with the line and the figure 'twenty-five' under it, bothered me for a while. But the figure 'twenty-five' represents the figure on the roulette wheel where the alphabet starts. The plus three simply means three figures from that, and going to the right on the wheel is where it actually starts. Some groups of figures say minus, and you simply count back the number from the one under the line. In the first group the third figure from 'twenty-five' is 'thirty-one' and the letter 'a' starts there. The alphabet starts from there. Now doing that, using the roulette wheel as the guide and placing the letter 'a' under the right number, and counting around—for the alphabet always goes around the wheel to the right—you get this for the message:

" 'Your—wise, ship one thousand in seven weeks, fifty split. Be careful.' "

I looked at the mass of figures which under Bartley's guidance shrunk to the simple statement before us. But there was a blank after the first word, and I wondered what it was. Turning, I asked.

He replied that he was not sure. The figures

giving the indication for the word seemed to be mixed, and he was unable to decipher it. He said there were so many thousands of combinations on the wheel, that, if one were wrong, it would be impossible to figure out what it might mean. Thayer, after a moment's glance, said it was a very clever code, to which Bartley replied there was no doubt of that. It was a code that could not be puzzled out, unless one knew it was based upon a roulette wheel.

"I wonder if that missing word is brother?" I ventured.

"How could it be?" broke in Thayer, not waiting for Bartley to reply. "How could it be his brother? That message must deal with some attempt to run the drugs down from Montreal. His brother was in London; he was not presumed to know anything about drugs."

Bartley half agreed, saying that there was no doubt it was a message relating to the shipment of drugs. He added that there would be many reasons why those engaged in it would not wish to take any chances of the knowledge getting out when they were operating. But he was rather interested in that clause, "be careful." Had something happened which had warned them they were being watched? Or had Culver and the man who

was killed on his return trip decided to cheat the others out of their share of the money received from the drugs?

Whatever it might be, after a long conversation we at last gave it up as a bad job. Bartley had translated the message: What it might actually mean, what bearing it might have on the murder, remained to be seen. The conversation returned to the death of the minister. That, after all, was the real mystery to me, even greater than the death of Culver. Why any person should kill the minister, who was a harmless, inoffensive soul, I could not divine.

We talked back and forth a while. Bartley informed us that there seemed to be no doubt the minister had been killed to prevent his telling something that he had discovered. And what he had discovered he found out in the last few moments before his death. I tried to figure out what this might be, but there seemed nothing that would give me any light.

Finally the conversation died away, and Bartley suggested that we go out on the veranda for a bedtime smoke. The night was dark, the air a bit cool, but the stars were bright above us. A ray of light from the house across the way told us that Culver

was up, and I studied it for some time. Thayer's voice roused me from my thoughts:

"That bird keeps his light burning all night."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Bartley.

"Yes; heard the housekeeper say so," was the reply.

Nothing more was said, and we sat there for some time. At last rising to his feet and throwing his cigar away, Bartley suggested it was time for bed. When we reached the doors of our rooms and were about to say good night, Thayer asked: "Do you think you ever can solve these murders, John?"

Bartley turned, his face serious. "It's not a question of solving them. It's a question of proving what I know."

"Proving?" came his friend's voice. "The next thing, you will be saying you know who killed the two men."

The answer was cool and sharp: "I know who killed them both; but it's a far harder thing to prove it."

And, leaving Thayer and myself staring at him in astonishment, he went into his bedroom.

CHAPTER XV

WE RECEIVE AN EARLY VISITOR

I WENT to bed with Bartley's words running through my mind, and they were there when I awoke in the morning. As I dressed, I thought of his remark that he knew who killed both Culver and the minister, and I wondered whom he suspected. One thing I knew, and that was that Bartley did not make such positive statements regarding his cases unless he had something to go on. And if he said that he knew who killed the two men, then I was sure he did know. Yet, after all, we had done very little work on the case, and I could not but wonder.

Thayer seemed to feel the same way; for, when I went down to breakfast, he was alone in the library and at once asked me if I had any idea as to whom Bartley might suspect. I said I had none, and for a while we tried to figure out who it could be. This proved a rather hopeless task, for there seemed to be no one to suspect, unless it was the doctor. I told Thayer what the former house-keeper had said regarding seeing the doctor at the

house. This caused the writer to say that it was not probable the doctor knew Culver very well, and I must be mistaken when I thought he told me he did not know him at all.

Bartley had eaten early, leaving word with the housekeeper that he had gone to the village. It was around noon when he returned, and he was in a rather happy mood. But, to our questions, he answered that there had been nothing new discovered regarding the death of the minister. He said the murder had shocked the town far more than that of Culver, and that every person had tried to find something which would throw light on the crime.

The known facts of the murder remained practically as they were the night before. The minister had gone back to the study after walking through the church with Culver's brother. People in the yard had seen Culver's brother drive away. The minister had returned to the study and shut the door. One new item had been disclosed: There had been discovered a young woman who had gone to the study door and knocked. This was the only bit of new evidence that had been found during the last twelve hours. The minister's voice had called, "Come in," but the young woman had only opened the door and did not enter the room. He was seated

by his desk and seemed rather disturbed. She asked a question regarding some meeting to be held during the week, and then she shut the door again. Twenty minutes later the young man we had met went to the door, knocked, received no reply, opened the door, and saw the minister lying by the window. He called out in surprise and rushed to the minister's side. That was all that the people had been able to discover regarding the murder.

Why the minister was murdered seemed impossible even to theorize over. He had been a simple sort of a man, with a rigid religious faith—one that he worked hard for. Because the town itself was rather old-fashioned in its religious views, the narrowness of the minister had caused no comment. There seemed no reason why he should have an enemy. Yet he had been murdered.

Lunch was half over when Bartley received a long telegram. Thayer, who answered the door-bell, brought the yellow-jacketed message to the table, and we watched Bartley read it. As his eyes took in its contents, he half smiled, and then to my surprise, as he placed the message in his pocket, suggested that we have a game of golf.

The game Bartley played that afternoon told me that he was near the end of the case. Often his golf was a laughable thing to watch. But one thing

always happened: With a case solved, he would play an uncanny game. And the game he played that afternoon was almost perfect. From the time he drove off at the first tee, with a drive that went two hundred and fifty yards straight down the course, till he sank a fifteen putt on the eighteenth green his game was a marvel. When the ball rolled into the last cup, he gave a happy grin, as he looked at his score, and we started back to the house.

When we went to his room, after our return, there was a small package on Bartley's dressing table. I watched him, as he tore off the paper and brought to light two prints. He looked at them for a while, read the note which accompanied the package, then handed them to me with the words: "There is the evidence that will convict a man of killing Culver."

Eagerly I took the two prints from his hand. I hardly knew what I expected to see, but when I looked I could not understand what they might be. There were two prints, and they were simply a mass of lines, rising and falling across the paper. They looked something like the stock-market charts, graphs of the rise and fall of some stocks. I knew they could not be that, yet I did not know what they represented. The two graphs were identical, the lines having the same rise and fall. As I

studied them, I grew more and more bewildered. There was a look of mirth on Bartley's face when he saw my curious expression. As I returned them, I ventured: "What are they, John?"

He put the prints away before he replied, and then he said: "You will have to wait a while, Pelt; then you will find out."

After dinner we retired to the veranda and smoked for a while. When it was dark, we went into the library, and Bartley, finding a book that pleased him, sank into a chair to read. But he was not destined to read very long, for about nine o'clock the doctor came.

He apologized for his visit, saying frankly that he was very keen to meet Bartley, but had been unable to do so because of the press of work and his duties as coroner. Bartley seemed a little pleased when the doctor told him he had his book on "Some Rare Poisons" in his library, and for a while the two men talked of this and that. At last, however, they came to the thing I wanted to hear.

I had understood the doctor, the night he came to the jail to see me, to have said that he did not know Culver. The housekeeper, however, told me she had seen him at the house around midnight. It had seemed a bit queer to me, and, to my surprise, Bartley with a laugh told the doctor he had

the impression he did not know Culver, but that the housekeeper said he had been to the house. I noticed that Bartley's eyes did not leave the young man's face, though there was no surprise or seeming confusion in the frank gaze that returned his look. Instead, he said: "Yes, it's true; I hardly knew the man. I was called in one night to see him. I remember it very well, because the call came to the office around seven, and I did not answer it till I had returned from a case in the country. It was about twelve when I got to Culver's. He had a hard cold, but the thing I noticed most of all was that he appeared a bit put out at my late visit, and he tried to get me out of the house as quickly as he could."

"Have you any idea why he wanted to get you out of the house?"

The doctor shook his head slowly. "No; yet I assumed that he was expecting some one. He kept glancing at his watch, though there was a big clock on the wall before me. So I took the hint and left. Just as I got into my car, another car stopped some yards behind me. I did not see who was in it, though I did see a man go up the walk after I drove away."

He paused, then added: "Sometimes after that when I saw him, which was not very often, he would

“speak, and sometimes he would not”—he laughed—
“like the night of the murder.”

“Are you positive it was Culver you saw?”

“Well,” came the rather positive reply, “I was sure at the time. It took the minister’s story of seeing him the same hour at the other end of the town to shake my faith. Still, I am pretty sure it was Culver.”

“You did not see his face?”

“No, I did not. He turned after I spoke to him. You see, I called, as I rushed past in the car—I was going pretty fast, I and was several hundred feet away when I stopped—but he paid no attention to me.”

For a while the two men talked about their experiences in France. It was the doctor who did most of the talking, Bartley by shrewd questions drawing him out and giving little information in return. As I looked at the young man, the more I began to doubt my suspicion that he knew anything about the crime. I had presumed also that he might have been mixed up in the smuggling of the drugs, but I began to doubt even that. His face was that of a rather nervous and, perhaps, over-worked man. A keen face, burnt brick-red by the sun, with kindly eyes. As I listened to the two men

talking, I decided that my suspicions regarding the doctor had been wrong.

After he left, Bartley came back to the library and in a moment said: "I am afraid, Pelt, you will have to build up a new theory—one that does not have the doctor in it."

Thayer gave me a surprised look and asked: "Did Pelt have an idea the doctor knew anything about the affair?"

Bartley nodded and stopped my protest by saying: "Yes; that is, perhaps, a rather wee suspicion that he might have known something. But I judge the doctor is all right. I doubt if he knows a thing about the crime."

It was late when I went to bed. Bartley was still reading when I went upstairs, and I have no idea what time he retired. I was tired and went to sleep at once. In fact it was Bartley who roused me in the morning by shaking my arm and, when I had opened my eyes, telling me to dress, because Carter was down in the library and wished to see us.

I gave a glance at my watch; it was only seven—a rather early hour for any one to call. I took little time in getting on my clothes. The fact that Carter had come to the house at such an early hour

was enough in itself to convince me that something had taken place. Bartley waited until I was dressed, and we went downstairs together. Thayer was still sleeping, for his bedroom door was closed.

We found Carter impatiently pacing the library floor, and he turned with eagerness, as we entered. From the expression on his face, I could tell he was pleased over something. His first words were to apologize for getting us up so early, but he added significantly that he knew that Bartley would wish to hear what he had to tell.

After he had lighted the cigar Bartley gave him, he stretched out in his chair and said: "Well, I got something last night that may throw some light on the murder."

Bartley did not reply, and the government man continued: "I have had some men at work here for the past two weeks or so, and last night we picked up a man."

He paused, as if expecting Bartley to ask him a question, but, since he did not, went on: "We recognized several days ago a man, who was hanging around the town, as a member of the gang that we had been watching on the Montreal end of the drug case I told you about. He did not seem to do anything, though I had him shadowed for a couple of days. Last night I suddenly decided to have him

pulled in, and I gave him a bit of the third degree to see if he would talk."

He grinned, as if the thought of what had taken place was pleasant. "Well," he said, "I judge I scared the life out of the chap. He was in rather bad shape for want of cocaine, and I went right after him. Told him I had the goods on him, informed him of a good many things about that Montreal crowd he thought no one knew anything about. And at the end he talked—and talked plenty."

The story was a rather long one. It went back to the beginning of the drug running. The man that Carter had caused to be arrested had been a sort of handy man for the man who was killed on his return from Culver's, the man who had been the most important member of the Montreal group and had never before made the trip down in a car. His doing this had caused talk, and later those in the ring became suspicious that he was going to double-cross them. This story had been dragged out of the man whom Carter had had arrested, and it was more or less disconnected in the telling; but the main points of the story were clear.

After the Montreal man was killed, there was a good deal of talk regarding his death, but the man now in the town jail told Carter that he knew noth-

ing about the death, whether it was accidental or not, but he had an idea that perhaps it was not accidental. Then there came the news that the drugs had never reached New York, he said, and, though they were anxiously awaited for some weeks, they did not come through. It was right here that Culver came into the case.

As I shot Carter an inquiring look, he saw my glance and replied: "There is no doubt now, Pelt, that Culver was mixed up in the thing. I had the idea he was one of the big men in the ring. Now I am sure he was."

"How do you know that?" demanded Bartley.

Carter gave a happy grin. "Why," he said, "this chap I nabbed had run two cars down, and each time he had made his deliveries to Culver. He knew him before this, and it was Culver to whom he gave his load at the end of the trip. He knew also that other cars at various times had come down, but where they went, he does not know. Still, we know that Culver received at least two shipments of drugs from Montreal."

"But," I asked, "what was that man you arrested doing down here, anyway?"

"That's the rest of the story. He knew that twice drugs had been delivered to Culver, because he had delivered them himself when his chief was killed; he

knew that he had been to Chester. Then the news came that the cargo had never reached New York. No one seemed to know where it was. Then he remembered another thing—that before each trip from Montreal his chief would write a letter. Once he had to mail one of the letters, and it was addressed to Culver. Three days before the last trip was made, he came into the room just as his boss was finishing some sort of letter. He got a glance at it, but it was simply a mass of figures that made no sense. The sheet was placed in an envelope which he was given to mail. It was addressed to Culver——”

Carter paused to light a fresh cigar, then continued: “So, later, he heard that the shipment never reached New York. Next, some weeks after that, he heard Culver had been murdered. That made him get busy. Telling a friend, he pledged him to secrecy, and they came down here. He had an idea something might be found in Culver’s safe that would tell where the dope had been hidden. Anyway, they made one attempt to get in, but were scared away.”

“Only one?” broke in Bartley’s quick tone.

“Only one, and that was the night you caught them. The man swears by the seven gods that they made but one attempt to get into the house.

He got in all right, but your falling over a chair scared him away."

I remembered the girl had said that some one tried to enter the house the night her uncle was murdered. Yet if the man had told Carter the truth, it could not have been he. I shot a glance at Bartley, and he slowly nodded back to me. He was thinking the same thing.

There was little more of value in Carter's recital of what he had discovered. The man had no idea where the drugs had been placed. He insisted that he hardly knew Culver, or where he had gone, or why he had left the town so suddenly after he received news that the man who had delivered the last shipment was killed. He admitted that perhaps there were half a dozen who knew that Culver was one of the principals in the illegal traffic, but had never heard a hint that any of them might have killed him. In fact, the death of Culver had come as a great surprise to them, and they did not know how to explain it.

When Carter had finished, he gave us a glance to see what we thought of his story. Bartley's face was grave, and he said nothing. I myself could not see that he had discovered much of importance. True, he had definitely linked Culver with the drug ring. That, however, was not of the greatest impor-

tance now. Culver was dead, the law could not reach him, and he had been murdered. Yet there seemed to be a hint that perhaps some member of the drug ring had killed him. It seemed reasonable that if one person knew about the large shipment which had been made, then others might have known. And there seemed little doubt that Culver and the man killed in the automobile accident had intended to cheat the others out of the profit on the last shipment.

I stopped thinking of these things to listen while Bartley told Carter about the code message, and how he had deciphered it. Carter listened carefully, but said, when it was ended, that for the life of him he could not see why Culver had tried to hide the message, why he had not simply thrown it aside.

Bartley agreed to this, but added that he always found that criminals did the unexpected. He admitted that there seemed little reason to hide the message, for it did not give the place where the drugs were hidden; yet all the messages sent Culver, telling him when shipments were to be made, must have been in code, so they could not be read if they fell into other hands. He suggested that it may have been that Culver deciphered it, found there was one word that he did not know the cipher for and had hidden it, intending to wait until he saw the person

who wrote it. Then, perhaps, the man had told him what the cipher meant, but, in the excitement over the man's death, Culver had not bothered to destroy the message.

After some further argument Carter said this might be so; and for a while they talked of the minister's murder. On this, Carter had no theories, and he was not much interested, saying it was out of his line. He did express his astonishment that the minister had been killed, and he said that ministers did not regularly figure in murders. But he had no theories regarding the crime.

After he had gone, Thayer, who had come downstairs while Carter was in the library, suggested that breakfast might be a good thing. The breakfast turned out to be a silent meal, and it was not until it was about over that Bartley rose with a sudden exclamation. After he went out into the hall we heard him at the telephone, and his voice filtered back to us, though we were unable to distinguish the words that he used. When he returned he said, as he sank back into his chair. "I want that story Carter just told me in the paper to-night. I just called the editor and gave him a tip to call Carter."

"You want it in the paper?" said Thayer.
"Why?"

Bartley shrugged his shoulders. "Well, it's a good story, Thayer, and I know that good stories don't 'break' often in this little town."

Thayer murmured something about there having been enough good stories lately and went back to his breakfast. When it was over, we strolled out on the lawn and walked slowly back and forth under the tall trees. For a while no one had much to say; then Thayer asked a question which he said he had been thinking over for some time.

"John," he asked, "do you really know anything more about Culver than you did?"

"A good deal," came the reply, "almost a life history. To start with, I know that Culver for many years ran shady brokerage houses. Every little while he would fail, go to a new city, open another place—only to fail again. Then he got hold of some money and opened that big curb house which failed so spectacularly a few years ago. He went to jail for a few months because of it. He had made enough money to satisfy the ordinary man for life, but the lawyers got most of it, keeping him from jail, and then getting him out after he got in. After that the outline is less clear."

"How did you find that out?" inquired Thayer in a rather astonished tone.

"District attorney's office in New York. They

had all the information regarding his career as a fake broker. Of course they had nothing after he went to prison; their case was ended then."

He paused, then continued: "After that, Culver came up here. I have the idea it was because he thought it would be a good place to hide; also, no doubt, his plan of getting drugs from Montreal had been completed by that time. This was a quiet place, and there would be no suspicion about what happened. To make sure that nothing would be noticed, he kept to himself and hardly ever went out. All might have gone well but for one thing."

"And that was his not knowing Carter was after him," I suggested.

"I doubt if he knew Carter was after him," came the reply. "It was something more serious than that."

Since he did not go on, I asked: "What do you mean?"

"Simply this: You remember that about four months ago, bucket shop after bucket shop, the country over, failed? Now Culver, like most men of his type, knew the bucket-shop game—knew it was something hard to beat. But he could not resist the attempt to beat the other man's game. Gamblers are the same. They will leave their own place and play in some other man's house all night.

The district attorney tells me that when Reitz & Reitz were closed up by his office, it was found, when the books were gone over, that Culver was one of the big losers——”

“But,” interposed Thayer, in a rather bewildered voice, “what has all that got to do with it?”

“It has this: Culver must have been pretty well wiped out so far as money went. From the checks we find that he played the market after the sale of his niece’s property. He must have poured her money into the market, hoping it would go up. Suddenly the government closed the broker’s office, and Culver lost almost everything. There was something left, and he then decided to go away. There was little else he could do. His money was gone, and in several months he had to turn over to the girl her property. It was gone, and discovery was certain. Then—and this, of course, is theory—I think he and the man from Montreal decided to make the largest shipment of drugs which had yet been made. But this time they were to sell it, get the money and skip. Then fate stepped in once more.”

“How?” I asked.

He threw me a disgusted look, as much as to say that I should know, but answered: “The man was killed on his return to the car, either through acci-

dent or through murder. Perhaps the gang had got wind of what the two men were trying to do. That is what I think Culver thought; anyway, he skipped at once when he heard that the man had been killed on the return trip. Then, some weeks later, he returns secretly."

"What for?" inquired Thayer.

"To get the dope," I replied before Bartley could answer.

"No doubt that was the reason," came Bartley's reply. "He certainly knew where it was, and he needed the money it would bring."

"And then," said Thayer, as he threw aside the cigar he had been smoking, "some one of his ring was ready for him and killed him."

Bartley looked at him rather seriously for a moment. "Perhaps so. It's as good a guess as any you might make, Thayer." He paused a second, then said: "But we will know soon."

"Soon?" I ventured.

He had started for the house, but at my question turned and looked at us. There was a slight twinkle in his eye. "Yes, very soon," he said. "To-night if my plans go through. You and Thayer better try to make up your minds as to who committed the murder."

Thayer started to say something, but Bartley

stopped him with the remark: "Here is your chance, Thayer, to solve a real mystery. It's fine practice for that detective story you are going to write."

Thayer passed the last allusion by, but asked: "Do you mean that to-night——"

Bartley broke in on him. "If all goes well, you will get the surprise of your life to-night."

CHAPTER XVI

WE HAVE OUR SURPRISE

THAYER had intended to spend the day finishing a short story, but Bartley's statement at the close of breakfast evidently made him nervous. After a vain attempt to write, he gave it up in sheer disgust. He joined me out in the yard and asked if I really thought Bartley had found the criminal. Long experience with Bartley prompted me to say that I was pretty sure he had, for he never made such a positive statement unless he was at the end of a case.

For some time we both made vague guesses as to who the murderer might be, and what Bartley intended to do when night came. This was, however, profitless, for to me the case seemed to have gone into a blind alley without the slightest hint of a solution. When Thayer left me, I threw aside the book I had been reading and tried to puzzle the thing out. I ran through in my mind all the things I knew regarding the murders. First, I thought of the mysterious death of Culver. That was the

crime we were interested in; the death of the minister, sad in itself, was not after all our first concern. But, though I thought of the story Carter had told us, and of the other things that we had discovered regarding Culver, in the end I gave it up.

Bartley had left for town shortly after breakfast without saying just where he was going. I had hinted that I would go with him, but he suggested that perhaps I had better stay at the house, for he was expecting a telegram. It came around noon; in fact, there were two telegrams. I was tempted to open them, but I did not. We waited until almost one o'clock, but Bartley did not arrive, and in the end Thayer and I had lunch alone.

The afternoon slowly slipped away. It was a cool day; the sun was fairly warm, but a breeze came sweeping from the hills—a breeze that caused the wheat in the near-by fields to bend before it and gently waved the branches of the trees in the yard. A lazy afternoon it was, with no one to talk to, for in the end, Thayer went back to his writing desk, leaving me to myself.

Late in the afternoon Bartley drove into the yard, and, after leaving his car by the garage, came to where I was sitting under the trees. He looked cool, but there was an air of weariness about him. As he took the other chair, he threw me the copy

of the local paper, with the remark there was something in it which would interest me.

The paper was a small—four-page—affair, a typical country newspaper. As a rule, the copies I had seen had devoted a few inches only to national news, the rest being mostly boiler plate and locals. But, as I looked at the first page, I saw blazoned all over it the story of the arrest which Carter had made. I glanced at Bartley, and he simply nodded, saying I had better read the story. It told the story of Culver's connection with the smuggled drugs and the arrest which had been made, somewhat differently from the way I had heard it from Carter's lips. It was the conclusion that surprised me. The story ended by saying that this arrest was only the first that would be made. It hinted that the man arrested had made important confessions, and that within a few hours a more important arrest was to come. One thing I noticed in particular. The story was written in the clearest and most concise English—the work of some one who could write well. No country reporter had written that story.

As I placed the paper down and glanced at Bartley, he said: "How do you like my story?"

"Did you write it?"

He nodded his admission, and I gazed at him in

astonishment; why he should spend his time writing for a country paper the story Carter had told us, was more than I could see. Seeing my astonishment, he drew his chair a bit closer.

"I wanted that story in the paper to-night, and I wanted certain things to be said," came his confession. "Carter, of course, does not expect to make that important arrest the paper mentions—that is, unless this story does what I think it will do."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Simply this: I have a suspicion that the person who reads it—the right person—may get a bit excited. He will read that it says 'an important arrest will be made within a few hours,' perhaps he will decide to forestall that arrest and vanish."

"You mean——" I broke in on him.

"I mean this: There is in this village some one who knows where those drugs are hidden—some one who thought he was perfectly secure—that there was not a single hint of suspicion regarding him. He will read the paper and become uneasy. That phrase, 'an important arrest,' will trouble him. He feels secure, but there is one thing he will be unable to understand. So far as he is aware, he is the only person who knows about the drugs. Yet the paper hints that some one else knows—that there will be

an arrest made. Unless I miss my guess, sometime to-night, about eleven or twelve, he will lose his head, decide it's time either to get out of town, or to take the drug to some other place. If so, we will be right there waiting for him. That piece in the paper is simply the fly to tempt the flight. It's there to have him jump at our own time."

"But," I protested, "that means that you know where the drugs are."

"Well," he drawled back, "I think I know. It seems to me pretty certain that Culver bought that old house for no other purpose than to have a safe place to store them. You see no one ever went to the place; it was perfectly safe. There could be no reason on earth except that for his buying the house. So we will be there to-night waiting"—he rose to his feet, then added—"simply waiting."

"But, John," I suggested, "it's the murderer we want."

He paused to throw me a curious look, then remarked, as he started for the house: "Oh, he won't be very far away."

The telegrams were on the stand, and he opened them. Then, without a word, he took a pencil from his pocket, wrote for a moment on the first telegram, and handed it to me. In the dim light of the hall I read:

LONDON.

Government issued no passport to Robert Culver.
Can find nothing regarding man in war records.

LYLE.

As I turned to question Bartley, he anticipated me:

"Lyle is one of the Scotland Yard group. I cabled for a little information and seem to have got it."

"But," came my quick response, "if that is so, it means that Culver's brother did not come from England."

As he started up the stairs to his room, he turned and said with a mocking smile: "It may mean many things, Pelt, but of course it's not conclusive. He might have come under another name. Yet the English war records contain almost every name in England during the war. If his name was not there, then either he was not in England during the war, or else——" He threw out a hand in a sweeping gesture, then continued upstairs.

Rather dazed, I wandered into the library. Another and a wilder thought rushed into my mind. Was there any chance that Culver's brother could be the murderer? Without the slightest suspicion I had accepted the story of his coming from England. Every one else had accepted it. Now the British

government denied that it had given a passport to any man of that name. I knew also that Bartley had not neglected to check up the information from the government officials in New York, for the other telegram bore the government frank. Yet Culver himself had written weeks before he died that his brother was coming from England. Had the two men met, and during a quarrel had one killed the other? Bartley had said that if all went well he would end the case to-night. I could not but think that he was perhaps mistaken, for the case had suddenly become more mysterious.

Thayer came wandering into the room, asking if Bartley had returned. I told him of the telegram and saw his eyes grow big. For a while we discussed the turn of affairs, being driven in the end to one conclusion—that perhaps my suspicions were unfounded. Culver's brother had not arrived in town until some days after the murder. The fact that there had been no passport issued bearing his name did not mean so much as I had first thought. Often people came across under assumed names. There was not the slightest bit of evidence that even suggested that he had anything to do with his brother's death. We left it there and waited for Bartley to return.

Bartley was at his best during lunch, all care being

thrown aside. About the telegrams he would say nothing, though Thayer tried several times to get him started. A stranger would hardly have believed he had made the assertion a few hours before that the time was at hand when he was to solve the mystery. Instead, he talked and laughed, as if he did not have a single care on his mind—as if crime and criminals had never entered his world.

But, lunch over, his manner changed. The house-keeper had cleared the table, while we lingered over our cigars. When she left the room he turned, his manner becoming at once serious.

“To-night,” he said, fingering a fork which had been forgotten, “I hope to be able to give you some information as to who killed both Culver and the minister. It was the same person, and I don’t think there is going to be much difficulty in proving it. There are only one or two small threads to pull up.”

He lighted a cigar, and, with a glance at our eager faces, went on: “Both Carter and myself think that if the shipment of drugs did not reach New York, then it is still here in Chester. We also believe that there is little doubt the drugs are hidden somewhere in that house Culver bought. The best thing is to catch the person with the drugs in his possession. That is why we are going to the house to-night.”

For some reason or other Thayer did not ask any questions, and we passed the next hours just loafing about the house. It was about seven when Bartley, who had left the room, returned, and, throwing me a squatty, black automatic revolver, remarked it was about time we started, and that I had better have a gun with me.

A few moments later we were in his car, swinging down the road toward the town. I wondered if he was going to drive directly in front of the old house, yet I knew he could not leave his car near it. Presently we reached the long hill which led to the house, climbed it, and swept past the place. It looked empty and silent, but the lower windows were not all boarded up, as they had been when I first saw it. There was not the slightest sign of life about the place, nor any hint that any one had been there. I got these impressions, as we went by, for the car did not stop. Since I knew that Bartley was expecting some one to come to the house, I wondered just where we were going, and where he would leave his car.

I soon found out; for about a quarter of a mile past the house there appeared a small and very uneven road that ran down into the woods. It left the main road and became simply a track which had been used for logging. Though the going was rough,

and the road very narrow, Bartley drove his car under low-hanging boughs of the trees. The path, for that was about all it was, ran around the trees, and there were several stumps in the center of it.

We stopped in a small clearing where in the past some logging concern had a camp. The long, rough buildings, now closed and deserted, stood at the extreme end of the open space. Here Bartley stopped the car and climbed out. For a moment he stood looking around, as if seeking his direction; then, with a sign for us to follow, he struck off across the clearing and into the woods.

It was almost dark, and under the trees the going was not only uneven, but also difficult. Once there had been some kind of path, but evidently it had not been used for years. The vines had grown over the cleared space, and they plucked at our feet. The branches of the small trees on each side whipped across our faces, and I heard Thayer mutter an oath, as he tripped and almost fell. Bartley was in the lead, walking with the sureness of a man who knew just where he was going.

In about five minutes we came out of the woods and into a field. It stretched across to a stone wall. Beyond the wall, simply a mass in the darkness, I made out the form of a building—a building that had a familiar appearance. Here Bartley paused

to say that we were in the rear of the house where Culver had been found murdered; then he struck off again in the shadow of the trees.

A few feet beyond us the trees ran down to the stone wall. There was a field to cross, which Bartley entered apparently with little fear of being seen by any one who might happen to be in the house. However, this was a small risk, for if any one saw us, he would have to be outside. On this side, the windows of the house were boarded, from which it would be impossible to look out. We paused again, this time under the shadow of the broken-down barn.

Just as we stopped, a man disentangled himself from the shadows and came toward us. I gave a start, but in a second saw that it was some one whom Bartley knew. He went over to him, and for a moment or so they held a whispered conversation. Then the man's figure melted into darkness, as Bartley came back to our side.

"That was one of Carter's men. He says that no one has been near the house," came his low voice.

I heard Thayer mutter, and Bartley spoke again:

"Carter has several of his men here, and he himself is in the house. We are to wait out here. There is a man in the front, and one in the rear, so we will slip into the barn and wait."

"May I smoke?" pleaded Thayer.

Bartley said he must not, and we slipped through the back of the barn, where the side had fallen away, into what remained of the barn itself. It had been a small building, and it was a wonder that it could stand at all. The front was gone, and great gaps in the side showed where the boards had fallen off. Inside there was simply an old carriage, and the dirt floor was strewn with boards and various odds and ends. From the interior one could get a good view of the house, which was only a few feet away. I could but think, however, that it was not the best sort of place in which to spend a few hours.

Our wait was apt to be a long one and, now that the night had fallen, a dark one. The wind was blowing a little, but it was very still, except for the crickets, with which the barn seemed alive, their chirps coming from every side. The carriage seemed to me to offer the solution of where to sit. So I climbed into it; though the cushions were in ruins, yet they were softer than the floor, and there was a clear view of the house. Whispering to Thayer, he climbed in after me, and we settled back to wait. Where Bartley went, I could not see, but I saw his dim form vanish.

For a while we sat there, silent. Before us was the open space where the barn door had been.

Across from that, a few yards at the most, was the black shadow of the house—lonely and somber in the stillness. There was not the slightest sign of any moving thing, and the house was very still. I tried to picture the lonesome wait that Carter was having, and wondered if, after all, any one would come. Thayer must have had the same thought, for, as the cushions creaked, when he nervously shifted his position, he whispered something about the crazy idea of expecting any one to walk up and be caught.

An hour passed, then two hours; and slowly the third hour. Long before that time was reached, however, we had climbed out of the carriage to stretch our benumbed legs, and we had walked around in the small barn. But there had been no signs of any person coming to the house, and we had not heard a thing. Waiting in the darkness for something that you are not sure about is at the best tiring. In this case, long before the first hour had passed, it had got on my nerves, and, as the time slowly dragged on, it became worse. Thayer was grumbling about the "fool thing" we were doing, when I heard the sound of an automobile chugging up the hill before the house.

The car was coming slowly, as if the steep grade taxed the power of the engine. We heard it splutter

and snort; then, as it topped the rise, there came the smooth sound of the engine. It did not stop, but, as we looked out of the barn door, we saw the lights sweep past the house and up the road. For several moments we heard the sound of the engine, then all at once it died away. Puzzled at this, for I doubted if the car had gone so far that we were unable to hear it, I started to whisper to Thayer. Just as I did so, Bartley glided suddenly from the shadow.

"I think perhaps our man has come," he whispered. "Keep as still as you can for a while. If you hear anything in the house, make a rush for it." Before we could answer, he vanished again.

Keeping in the darker shadows—though the barn was so dark it is doubtful if I could have been seen—I went to the door. There was nothing in sight. Still, I looked eagerly and impatiently. I hardly know what I expected, for it was almost impossible to see; yet I know I expected something. I started, as Thayer's hand fell on my shoulder, and I knew that he was also watching. The moments dragged on, as we stood there, but nothing could be seen or heard.

Suddenly, out there in the darkness of the yard, I heard a sound as though some one had stumbled. There came a half-smothered oath, and then there

darted across the line of our vision the figure of a man. For the space of a second we saw it, then it melted into the darker shadow of the house. I felt Thayer's fingers sink deeply into my arm, as we knew our vigil was about to end. Some one had come to the house, as Bartley had expected, and was about to go inside.

I knew that Bartley wished to catch the man with the drugs in his possession. There could be no chance then of his escaping the penalty of the law. Somewhere in the house cocaine was concealed. Both Bartley and Carter thought that. But, as I waited for some sign from the house, the suspense became almost unbearable. The house was still silent; and though the man must have entered there was nothing to indicate what was taking place. The moments dragged on, each one seeming endless, as we waited under the shadows of the barn wall.

The silence was suddenly broken by the sound of a shot, fired within the house. The sharp report came so unexpectedly that for a moment I stood motionless, listening. As the echo died away, there came a long, sharp whistle, which rose and fell upon the night air. I started on a run for the house, reached its side, then ran toward the front. From the sounds that came to my ears, some sort of struggle must have been going on within, and I

paused for a second to listen. Then again I started to run.

As I swung round the front of the house by the edge of the piazza, I ran smash into a man running in the opposite direction. We had not seen each other and came together with a great deal of force. As I recovered my balance, by sheer instinct I grabbed him. With an oath he shook my hand from his coat, but, with a cry for help, I seized him again. For a moment we struggled back and forth, the man trying to escape. He might have succeeded, for he was heavier than I, but for the fact that Thayer came to my assistance. As he reached me, Bartley came running to my side.

The three of us had little difficulty in holding the man. I had not seen his face, and the moment he was securely held he became silent. Who it was, I did not know. With his hand fastened in the man's collar, Bartley walked him up the piazza and into the house, taking us into the large room off the hall. There was a lamp there, its feeble light leaving the greater portion of the room in deep shadows. But the light was bright enough for us to recognize the man Bartley was holding. As the light fell across the face, twisted with rage, I saw that it was Culver's brother.

I heard Thayer give a low whistle—one of con-

sternation and surprise. Upon Bartley's face there was no wonder, only a half smile, as he saw my startled glance. For a second our gaze held Culver; then suddenly, his voice almost shrieking, he yelled: "What does this mean?"

As if in answer to the question, Carter came into the room from the hall. There was a heavy black bag in his hand, and I saw him slowly nod, as his eyes met Bartley's. I noticed that Culver's face had whitened a little, as he saw the bag Carter was holding, and suddenly he became silent. Carter called to one of his men, who went over and, with gun in hand, stood by Culver; then Bartley and the government man went out into the hall.

As we waited for them to return, I realized that Carter's part in the case was over. There seemed little doubt that the black bag contained the hidden drug. Yet the great surprise to me was that it had been Culver's brother he had captured. I had not expected he would know where the drug had been hidden. Then another thought struck me; Carter had his man, but Bartley still had to arrest the man who had committed the two murders.

There came the long-drawn-out shriek of an automobile horn from the road. As it died away, Carter and Bartley returned, and, as Carter motioned to his man to bring Culver, Bartley informed me

that the car had been brought from the woods where we had left it. We went out into the yard, where we found another man on guard. We climbed into Bartley's car, which was standing in front of another car belonging to Carter.

The ride back to town was a silent one, also a fast one. Bartley drove down the long hill as if speed laws had never been invented, the car swaying and lurching all over the road. Reaching the town limits, we sped down the car tracks and ended in front of the police station. Just as we climbed out Carter stopped behind us.

We were the first in the station, the others following. There was a man at the desk, no one else in the room. The police officer on duty looked at us curiously, motioning to the back room. Without bothering to knock, Bartley pushed open the door. From his chair behind the desk the chief gave us a startled glance; and Kelly, who seemed to be nervous, came to our side. In a second Carter had closed the door and, walking over to the desk, threw the black bag on its top.

In the silence which followed all eyes turned to the bag. Then with a sudden start, as though realizing what it foreboded, the chief's startled glance went back to Culver. The man stood just inside the closed door, his face white, his hands

trembling. Behind him, gun in hand, stood one of Carter's men, motionless. Whatever evidence Carter might have against the man, one thing was sure: Culver had lost whatever nerve he once might have had. Even as I looked at him, I saw the little black mustache tremble.

Silently Carter went over to the table and opened the bag. As he pulled its mouth wide, a small vial rolled down on the table, then to the floor, the glass breaking into a hundred pieces, as a small heap of white crystals formed by the table leg. Bartley bent, picking up a portion of the powder, which he carefully smelt and tasted. As he straightened up, he gave Carter a significant look.

Though the chief, I found later, knew about Carter and what he was after, yet he was puzzled. Culver, at least, he had not expected to see. In a few words Carter told of his wait in the house, how Culver had come, gone up the stairs, and later returned with the bag in his hand. It was then Carter had grabbed him, and, as Culver shook himself away and started for the door, he fired one shot as a warning. As we had just seen, the bag was filled with vials of cocaine, and there must have been at least seventy-five thousand dollars' worth before us.

Just as he finished, Culver burst forth, his voice

hoarse with emotion: "That's all right, but you have nothing on me."

I saw Bartley give him a little look; then he turned to Carter. "Whom do you think you have arrested?" he asked.

"Why Robert Culver, brother of the murdered man."

Bartley turned to the chief, his voice grave:

"Chief, I ask that you arrest the man before you for murder."

"Murder!" gasped the chief.

"Yes," came the cool voice, "for the murder that was committed a few days ago and for the murder of the minister."

"But," protested the chief, "you can't charge this man with the first murder. He was not in the country then."

My eyes had been on Culver's face, and at Bartley's words I saw the red flush of anger fade, and his face turned very pale. Bartley might not be right in what he said, but the man was afraid. I turned as Bartley asked:

"And who do *you* think this man is, chief?"

"Why it's Culver's brother—Robert, I think his name is."

Like a shot came back the answer: "It's nothing of the kind. This man is the man you presumed was

murdered. His name may be Culver, but it's James Culver, the man who lived in your village."

"But," insisted the chief, his eyes vainly appealing to us all, "Mr. Bartley, James Culver is dead. We found his body in that old house."

Slowly Bartley shook his head. "No, chief, James Culver is not dead. He is standing before you. He is the man Carter arrested, and he is guilty of the murder of his brother Robert and of the minister."

CHAPTER XVII

BARTLEY ENDS HIS CASE

IN the deep silence that fell, I saw the chief move nervously, as he gave a doubting glance at Bartley. I could clearly see he did not believe a word that he had heard. Kelly seemed far more amused than anything else, as though it were all a joke. Only Carter, whose expression told that he did not understand, seemed to accept without question what Bartley had said.

One thing, and one thing alone, caused me to believe that perhaps Bartley was right. It was Culver himself. Not only was his face ashen, but his whole body was trembling. The man was frightened, as if his nerve had suddenly left him, and he showed his fear. As all eyes turned upon him, his face slowly reddened under our gaze, and he suddenly burst forth:

"That's a lie—a damned lie. I just got in this country a few days ago. My brother was killed before I landed."

I saw the chief and Kelly nod in agreement, as their eyes met, and, from the look on their faces,

they must have thought Bartley had suddenly gone crazy.

Bartley did not reply to Culver's outburst, simply studying him a moment. Under the look the man dropped his gaze and moved uneasily to and fro. It seemed incredible to me that Bartley could be right, and that the man before us was the Culver we had thought murdered. Though the two men were about the same build, still they did not look alike. The dead man I had stumbled upon, had been conspicuous for his long ears and the very large nose; this man's ears were small, and his nose was straight and little. The murdered man had a head well covered with hair, this man was rapidly becoming bald. So, as I looked at him, I could but wonder why Bartley should have said that James Culver had not been murdered, but was standing before us. Only one thing restrained me from saying he was wrong—it was the fact that Bartley was seldom mistaken in his conclusions.

He turned to the chief. "Chief," he said, "there is not a doubt in the world that this man is the Culver you thought was murdered. This is the James Culver who lived in your village, the man you thought was dead. This man never was in England. I can prove what I say by a dozen things."

The chief and Kelly had been watching Bartley,

as he spoke, and for a moment Culver was neglected. Carter, who had been standing between him and the door of the police station, had shifted his position and now stood near the table. Thayer was so muddled that he hardly knew where any one was. I had noticed Culver move toward the door, and, just as Bartley finished his statement, he made a quick dash for the other room.

Between him and the open air was one room—the police station—and a policeman. Outside by the curb were three automobiles, and the engine of one was running. The last, perhaps, was the reason which impelled the man to do what he did. Before I could lift my voice in warning, and at the moment when all eyes were turned on Bartley, Culver gave one leap for the door. He reached it in a second, slipping into the other room, as he slammed the door in our startled faces.

The whole thing happened so quickly that for a second or so we were too astonished to move. We found out later that the desk officer, who knew nothing of what was going on in the chief's office, was roused from a paper he was reading by Culver wildly rushing through the room for the open air. It was Bartley who first dashed for the door and flung it open, with myself close behind him. We reached the sidewalk in time to see Culver leap into the car

whose engine was running. He threw over the gear, and the car started down the street. With a cry to the chief to follow, Bartley leaped into his car, I after him. Carter came tumbling in on us, just as the car started with a jump.

Culver was several hundred yards away, his car increasing in speed with every second. He swung down the length of the square, around the corner and across the car tracks—we after him. He was evidently heading for the country, hoping to escape in the darkness. All doubts of his guilt had vanished from my mind. Innocent men did not try to escape in this wild manner.

There was little traffic in the street, and I knew that, in a long run, Culver's chances of getting away were slim. Bartley's car was one of the best-known makes in the world—a famous English machine, a great deal more powerful than the car Culver was in. In a long chase there could be only one outcome. Even within the town limits we lessened the distance between the two cars to about a hundred yards. But, as Culver swung around another corner, a street car blocked our way, and it was several moments before we got around it. Culver had once more gained a long lead.

As we got going again, I could see the tail light of his car in the distance. He had reached the town

limits and was headed out on the long, straight country road, driving at a terrific speed. A car coming out of a driveway stalled in front of us, blocking the road and forcing Bartley to stop. When we got going again, Culver must have been almost a mile ahead.

Little by little Bartley increased the speed of his car till the figures on the dial crept from forty miles to fifty, slowly swung over fifty, and in the end remained steady at sixty. The car was running like the well-made machine it was—almost silently, and with a hint of more power in reserve if we needed it. The lamps threw a wide shaft of light down the white road, a road that seemed to be rising up to hit us, as we swept along. The fields were but a moving reel of blackness on each side, and ahead was the red tail light of Culver's on-rushing car.

I saw Carter take his revolver from his pocket, but at the sight of it Bartley touched his arm and shook his head. Evidently he did not wish a shot to be taken at the man. We were gaining on him every yard, and it seemed it would be only a few moments before we would be by his side.

All at once the road turned at a right angle to cross a railroad track, then ran, straight as an arrow, parallel to the railroad. As we bumped over the

track, we heard in the distance the long shriek of a locomotive; and, as we turned on the road, we saw in the distance the headlight, as it rushed toward us. Half a mile was covered when I saw that the road again crossed the track, and at the same time I saw something else.

We were only about two hundred yards behind Culver, and I knew there was hardly a chance in the world for him to cross the track ahead of the train. We should catch him at the crossing, where he would have to stop, while the train swept by. The road formed a half circle, as it swept over the tracks, a crossing without gate or watchman. Culver of course had seen the train; he could not help seeing it, for the headlight was a blaze of flame before him. Yet he did not slacken his speed. I saw him turn and give a look back at us, then his car gave a sudden burst of speed. He was going to try to beat the train to the crossing.

"The fool is going to try to make it!" exclaimed Carter.

With a roar the train swept toward us, the headlight getting larger every instant. For a second, as Culver swung over the tracks, I thought he would make it, and then I heard a faint smash, as the train struck his car. Bartley threw on his brakes, and we slid almost up to the tracks. The wind from the

cars swept our faces, and we heard the groan of the brakes, as the train began to come to a stop.

We all jumped from the car, and I felt sick at what I knew I must see. Culver had not been able to cross ahead of the train, and he had been struck when his car was in the center of the tracks. We had to wait a moment till the long train, which was slowly coming to a stop, went by; then we hurried across the tracks. No one spoke; no one wished to say a word.

The car had been thrown about fifty feet, and we found it a mass of wreckage in the ditch by the side of the road. We found Culver jammed against what was left of the steering wheel, and, as we bent over him, we thought for a moment that he was dead. But, as Carter and Bartley tenderly bore him over to the grass, he opened his eyes and gave a slight shudder. Carefully Bartley raised the man's head, and it needed but a glance to see that he would last only a moment.

The eyes of the dying man looked wildly around him; then, as they fell on Bartley, there came a look of recognition. For a moment they closed, and I thought it was all over, but they opened again, and he half gasped: "You win." Then he became silent. In the stillness I could hear the labored breathing, the gasps of pain.

Again the eyes opened, and I saw the man's lips move in an attempt to speak. There seemed to be some sort of appeal in his eyes. Seeing it, Bartley dropped on the grass by his side. The man made an effort to speak, failed, then tried again, panting out:

"You—right—I killed both—had to. I am James Cul——"

Silence came again, as the man's voice trailed away, and in the silence I heard the sound of voices, the people coming from the train. There came also, far down the road, the sound of a rapidly approaching automobile; and, as I turned, I saw its lights when the car swept over the track. The dying man may have heard the sound, I cannot tell. He tried to raise himself on his arm, and his eyes sought nervously for Bartley. As Bartley's arm went under his shoulders, he gasped out:

"The girl—some money in bank—New York—under name Cannon." The voice faded away into a deep silence; he gave one little shudder, and Bartley gently placed the man's head on the grass. He was dead.

Just as we rose and stood looking soberly at the still figure on the grass, Thayer, with the chief and Kelly, reached our side, coming from the car which had stopped in the road. I saw Thayer's face turn

white, as he looked at Culver, while Bartley in a few words told what had happened. His news of the confession which had come from the dead man's lips, brought no answering reply from either the chief or Kelly. Both were too stunned to speak.

The conductor of the train and several others had now reached the spot, and arrangements were made to take the body to Chester. We went back to our car, and the ride to Thayer's house was a silent one, none of us having a word to say. When we reached the house, to my surprise the chief and Kelly came in with us; and, after a conversation over the telephone, the chief joined us in the library. Without a word Thayer had left the room and just as silently returned with six tall glasses, handing one, without speaking, to each of us. From the way each man drank his Scotch, there was no doubt we all thought the drink was needed.

The chief placed his empty glass on the desk and turned to Bartley, his voice a little unsteady, as he confessed:

"Mr. Bartley, things have come with such a rush to-night that my head's in a whirl. Tell me how you ever found out that that man was James Culver. He does not look like the man who lived here."

That was the question we all wished answered. Bartley had ended his case, having solved it in a

startling manner. But even the fact that the man had confessed before he died, did not make it any clearer in my mind. I could see that the others in the room felt the same way.

Bartley was silent a moment before he spoke, saying at last: "Well, it was a combination of many things, little clues that had to be woven into one big clew. From the very first I was suspicious that the affair was far more mysterious than you thought."

"From the first?" Thayer ventured.

"Yes, from the very first I felt that the murder of Culver was not the simple thing it appeared to be. After I heard of the manner in which he kept to himself and had nothing to do with the people of the town, I was pretty sure he had some ulterior reason for being here. Either he had come to this little place to hide, or else he had some scheme in view. Even before Carter told me of the case he was working on, I had come to the conclusion that Culver was interested in drugs."

"How did you make that out?" asked Carter.

"It was rather simple. The first thing was his being in the town at all. The next was the fact that he added hardly any deposits to his bank account until after the roads to the north had opened. Then, of course, the stories of the cars parked outside his house late at night told pretty plainly that

he was mixed up in something crooked. It could not be liquor, for that was too bulky. When I heard that Culver was the owner of the old house, I decided that perhaps drugs were the answer. It also explained to me why he left the city."

He paused to light a cigar and then continued: "Later I found out who he was, and about his career as a fake broker. Carter, of course, checked up the whole theory when he told us of his case."

"That's all right," came the chief's rough voice, "but what I want to know is this: How in the devil did you find out that this man we thought was the brother was actually the Culver we knew lived here?"

Bartley informed him that it was the district attorney of New York who first put the suspicion in his mind. The district attorney in his records had the evidence used in closing up Culver's fake brokerage house. They mentioned that he had a brother, also the fact the two men looked alike. If that were so, then the man murdered and the brother claiming to be from England must have a similar appearance. But they had not. That meant that the man claiming to be the brother—the man who was said to have come from England—could not be the brother at all. I easily discovered that the man had not been in England."

"How did you discover that?" Thayer queried.

"A simple thing—what came very near being a serious automobile accident."

"An automobile accident?" was Kelly's surprised question.

"Yes, what came near being one. After this so-called Robert Culver had arrived, Pelt and I saw him come very near being smashed up while driving a car. He was driving with one hand and reading a paper at the same time. A car coming at a terrific speed from the opposite direction was almost upon him before he glanced up. He had just time to turn out—he had to act from sheer instinct; there was no time to think—and he turned to the right."

"What under the heavens has his turning to the right got to do with it?"

"Simply this," was Bartley's reply: "The man driving the car was presumed to be Culver's brother, who had lived for years in England. In his car he was confronted by a situation in which he had no time to think. What he did had to be done quickly, by instinct. He acted subconsciously, without a thought of what he was doing, and he turned out to the right to avoid the other car. If he had turned to the left, he would have been smashed."

He paused, then added: "But, if he had lived in England for many years, when he made that quick turn he would have done what they do over there,

turned to the left. He did not, he turned to the right, and I decided on the spot that whatever the man might be, he at least had not come from England.

I heard a sudden gasp from Thayer, and Carter silently nodded his agreement. But Bartley did not wait for any one to speak; he went on;

"The next thing was to decide who the man might be, and that was not so easy. But three things aided me in discovering that the man was James Culver himself."

"What were they?" I asked impatiently.

"A dog, finger prints, and a picture of the man's voice."

"Of what?" began the chief.

Bartley half smiled. "Let us start with the first—the dog. The night Culver was murdered, his dog was killed. The niece says she heard it give one loud bark, no more. Now the dog, an Airedale, was presumed to be a 'one man dog.' That night, about midnight, some one came through the yard. If it had been a stranger, the dog would have barked his head off—and those dogs can make some noise. Instead, he gave one bark—one of welcome—for he knew who the person was. He was killed because Culver was afraid it would cause comment if later the dog never acted strangely with him. The dog's

death started me thinking; it was such a foolish thing to do. A stranger would kill him to prevent his barking. But he only barked once, because he knew the person. I began to wonder who it might be. There are not many people an Airedale makes friends with."

He paused again, to go on: "But that was a guess. Then, after the time Culver almost had his accident; I got a finger print."

"But, Bartley," protested Carter, "how could you get the finger print of a man who had been away for weeks?"

"That was easy. There was one place where I found several finger prints. Culver was a reader, also a smoker. In his books I found several places where a finger tip, moistened by a wet cigar, had left its imprint. They were the prints of the man who months before had read the books. I wanted to get a finger print of the so-called brother from England. That was easy; there were many ways of doing it. When the prints were enlarged and compared, I found one very interesting thing: I discovered that the finger prints in the books and the one I had got on my cigarette case were alike. In other words, the finger prints of the man who had lived in the house months before and the man who claimed to have just arrived from England were identical.

Since the finger prints of no two men are ever alike, I knew then they were made by the same man."

He slowly relighted his cigar, which had gone out, gave a look around, and, seeing that we were waiting for him to tell the rest, went on:

"Then I found that Culver had been a singer, and that the present man also sang. In his room there were phonograph records which he had made of songs he had sung. But these were made several years ago. I noticed that one had not been played more than twice. When I persuaded the minister to invite the Culver who claimed to be from England to sing, I had a man come from New York, and I asked him if he could make a record of his voice. He told him he was going to do the same with all those who sang at the church social. Culver fell. The record was made, and I had the voice on both records photographed."

"You had what?" burst from both the chief and Kelly.

Bartley grinned back at them. "I had the voice photographed. You know, that is being done to-day. The vibrations of the voice are taken on a delicate instrument and recorded in waving lines; a picture can be made of the vibrations. They remind you somewhat of the way the temperature is taken on a recording machine. Now we had the

voice on the old phonograph record, on which James Culver had recorded his song several years before, and the voice recorded the other night photographed. The song was the same, and the vibrations of both records were the same in the pictures of the voices that were taken. In other words, the same man had made both records. That being so, it meant that the James Culver who had lived in the town for months, and who you thought was murdered, and the so-called English brother—were the same man.”

“But,” the chief protested, “but, Mr. Bartley, the two men did not look alike. That murdered man was the Culver I had seen; this man, just killed, does not look like him.”

Bartley agreed to this, saying that was one of the reasons he had become suspicious. In the end he had decided the so-called brother was Culver himself. On this score the decision had been caused by the finger prints, the photographing of the voice, and also the fact that no one but James Culver and the man who had been killed in his car after the trip to Chester with the drug, could know where the drug was hidden. No brother from England could have known that.

I could see that the chief was still puzzled and acted as though he scarcely could believe it all. He had see James Culver, and the man who had just

died did not look like him. How then was Bartley so sure it was the man he had known, when their appearance was so very much different.

As if in answer to his thoughts, Bartley said: "Chief, there are some things in this case we shall never be able to clear up, little matters of detail which, after all, are not of the greatest importance now. We know why Culver came to Chester, and what he did here. We also know that he lost most of his money in the stock market; and, thinking he could get it back in a rise in the market, he sold his niece's property and used the money he received. Perhaps—and I think it is—the turning point came right here. The house he dealt with failed, and within a few weeks he would have to give an account to his niece of his trusteeship. I think it was then he decided to go away, and it's my impression he never expected to return. But something else came along to cause him to change his plans:

"What was that?" some one asked.

"He received news there was to be another shipment of drugs, and the plan was made to double-cross the ring, and for him and the Montreal man to divide the profits. Then the man who brought the drugs down was killed on his return trip. It was then that Culver made up his mind not only to go away, but later to return after the excitement had

died out. Perhaps the idea of murdering his brother came at that time."

He paused for a moment, then continued: "We do not know, of course, why Culver thought he must get his brother out of the way. I found out in New York that his brother had made a good deal of trouble for him. He once worked in one of his offices and got money from him on the threat to expose that he was bucketing orders. The brother must have had something in view, for I think he wrote to Culver that he was coming to see him. Maybe it was then he thought of killing him and taking his brother's place. The change could be easily made. No one in Chester would know or be suspicious. All Culver wished was a few weeks in which to dispose of the drug hidden in the old house. Then some day he would have simply vanished.

"But Mr. Bartley," begged the chief, "that may be so; yet the Culver we saw and the man just killed by the train, did not look alike at all. What happened?"

"That is very simple to answer. Culver's face, because of his great ears and large nose, was not easy to forget. He simply went to some expert in facial surgery and had his face made over. It's a rather easy operation. The large lobes of his ears were cut down, the hook in the nose taken away, and

the great mass of hair was thinned out by X-rays. When it was all over, and he had grown a little mustache, he would not be recognized, even by his own mother. The long lobes of his ears had vanished, the nose had a different shape, the curve of his face was changed. Hardly any one knew him in Chester, and he was perfectly safe in returning. When I saw him that day after he was presumed to have arrived from England, I noticed that his nose had been operated on, but I thought nothing of it then."

Bartley admitted that his first suspicions began when he found out that Culver was the owner of the old house. The shot that had broken the mirror convinced him that the murdered man did not know his way about the house. If he had, he would have known that it was a reflection that he saw in a mirror, and would not have fired at it. Culver, knowing the house, as he must, since he owned it, would not have fired the shot into the mirror; a stranger would have done that, but not a person who knew that the mirror was there.

I could see that the chief understood how Culver was able to change his features, but he wondered why no one had recognized him. Bartley asked him who there was that could do so. The girl had seen him but three times in her life, the housekeeper—the new one—perhaps had never seen him. The

people of the village only saw him when he passed by in his car. All he had to do, when he returned after the facial operation, was either to stick close to the house, or else do what he had never done before—to mingle with people. In either case there was not a soul who could tell that he was not the man he claimed to be.

Suddenly, as though remembering there was another murder to be accounted for, Thayer asked why it was Culver had killed the minister.

"Because," Bartley replied, "the minister recognized him. How he did it, I do not know; but for some unknown reason he did. That explains those last few words he uttered, 'Not—who—I thought.' I knew Culver killed him because of one thing. You remember that, under the window of the study, where the murderer stood when he struck through the curtain, was an old Christmas tree, its branches faded and dried. We went direct to Culver's and saw him. When he entered the room, on his trouser leg I saw three or four of the little brown pine needles from the Christmas tree. I doubt if there was another dead Christmas tree for miles around. When he stood under the window, the dried needles stuck to his clothes. They proved he had been there, and there was little doubt in my mind he killed the minister—though I doubt if one could ever prove it in a

manner that would satisfy a jury. Anyway, he confessed to both crimes.

There was a long silence, in which I saw the men give one another a look, as though agreeing that it was all satisfactory. It was Bartley who broke the silence, to add:

“Of course there were other things that made me suspicious. Robert Culver was afraid of the dark—a psychological fear. The supposed brother, when he came, left *his* light burning all night; he also was afraid of the dark. The man presumed to be murdered was a great reader of books mostly about spiritualism. The man claiming to be his brother also read the same kind of books. Then the story of the two men being seen the day of the murder in various parts of the town puzzled me, till I found out that neither the doctor nor the minister saw the face, though both thought they did see Culver and his brother, both going to the deserted house where the appointment had been made.”

I could see by the chief's face that he was running the thing over in his mind, and at last he rose to his feet. Taking his hat he stood looking at Bartley, an admiring expression on his face. Then all at once he started:

“There are more things in heaven——” But he did not finish the quotation. Instead, he said: “I

guess you are right, Mr. Bartley, though I don't see it all yet. But you got your man—anyway," he confessed.

Bartley agreed; and the chief and Kelly went out into the yard, Carter with them. After the good-nights were said, and they drove away, we returned to the library. By his desk Thayer turned to ask:

"Who tried to run over Pelt, John?"

Bartley, who was standing looking at a print on the wall, did not turn as he replied: "I don't know, Billy. That's one of the loose ends in the case. It was not the doctor, if that's what you mean. He told me to-day that Culver asked him to meet him in the woods the day Pelt saw them together, and he made some vague hints about having a quantity of drugs. I judge he was trying to secure the doctor's aid in disposing of them, since he was afraid to take them through the usual channels. But who tried to run Pelt down, we shall never know."

Silence fell again, and during it Thayer walked over to his writing desk and stood looking at a heap of typewritten manuscript before him. I saw him turn several pages, pausing to read what he had written. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders, he placed the manuscript back on the desk.

Bartley, who had been watching him, gave a little

chuckle, as he asked: "Going to use this case for your detective story?"

Thayer gave a deep groan, shaking his head. "No," he said, "it can't be done."

"Why not?" I retorted. "This one is true."

He laughed. "That's the trouble, Pelt. Just think what every one would say. They would call the plot impossible, or say it was old stuff. It's true all right enough, but——"

"But what?" I asked.

He grinned, as he turned to us both. "That's the trouble—it's true. After this I will stick to fiction. Truth is too impossible."

THE END

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